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A DIFFERENT KIND OF FAILURE:
Towards a model of experimental theatre as
transdisciplinary performance

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Bibliography **177***Documentation* **CD-Rom**

[20 digital photographs, 3 archival videos, 1 edited video, 2 script files and 1 design file]

Notes on Documentation:

The reader is invited to intersperse each chapter with digital documentation from the PaR experiments. The primary video documentation comprises three archival static recordings showing each PaR project in performance, plus one edited short film. These can be found on the CD-Rom accompanying this thesis and can be viewed as follows:

Between Intro & C1:	<i>Discords</i> at Warwick Arts Centre, January 2011
Between C1 & C2:	<i>Endlessness</i> at Pegasus Oxford, October 2011
Between C2 & C3:	<i>Fail Better Fragments</i> at Warwick, April 2012 (silent)
Between C3 & Conc:	<i>Fail Better Fragments</i> at Warwick, April 2012 (edit)

In addition to this, 20 digital photographs illustrate the thesis (in the Introduction and Chapters 1–3, as embedded *Figures* references within the text). Additional archival material (such as script and design work) can be found within the digital appendices (CD-Rom).

An alternative strategy for those who want to focus upon the written elements of the thesis first, would be to access the videos and files when an embedded *Figure* within the text provides a video time-code, for example: [See *Discords* video at 22m30s on CD-Rom].

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With the help of your good hands...

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to the performers and practitioners who helped me think: the Student Ensemble (at least fifty Warwick students who have flowed through this practice over the past seven years), the Fail Better Associates (including Jonathan Broke, David Tanqueray, Christopher Tester, Dave Thwaites and Ric Watts) and, in particular, Company Designer Nomi Everall ('My brave spirit').

I am writing in memory of Mary & Paul Armstrong and Margaret & Richard Heron.

Declaration

This thesis is my own work and it has not been submitted for a degree elsewhere.

The use of materials and documentation from the work of Fail Better Productions Ltd.

(Registered Office: 139 Reliance Way, Oxford, OX4 2FW) appears with the full approval of both directors of the company (Jonathan Heron and Nomi Everall).

All photographs are by Peter Marsh/ashmorevisuals except:

Figures 1.1–1.3 by Wei-Jean Cheah/Darkling Images;

Figures 2.1–2.4 by Jonathan Heron/Fail Better Productions;

IATL Student Ensemble member Ed Davis (now of RADA) edited the videos.

During the period of registration, I contributed to the following academic publications, which deal with some of the PaR projects, but from different perspectives:

- Monk N with Chillington-Rutter C, Neelands J and Heron J (2011) *Open-space Learning: A Study in Transdisciplinary Pedagogy*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Barry E, Broome M and Heron J (2014) ‘Not I’: Beckett and Psychiatry – Psychiatry in Literature, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 204: 239.
- Heron J and Johnson N (eds) (2014) ‘The Performance Issue’, *Journal of Beckett Studies* 23:1, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Heron J (2015) ‘Shakespearean Laboratories and Performance-as-Research’ in Hartley A (ed), *Shakespeare on the University Stage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

I made a deliberate choice not to recycle this material within the thesis, but some phrases or sentences may have accidentally migrated from one text to another.

The fault for this, and any other errors, will be entirely my own.

Abstract

This thesis draws on practice-as-research (PaR) and its documentation to investigate experimental theatre as transdisciplinary performance. I include case studies from my practice with Fail Better Productions and consider multi-/inter-/trans-disciplinary methods in theatre studies. Examples of twentieth-century experimental theatre are studied to define ‘three problems’ in performance: the *organic/mechanical*, *theatrical/scientific* and *playful/experimental*. The concept of ‘entanglement’ further develops my understanding of PaR methodology.

In Chapter 1, Samuel Beckett’s later dramatic works are explored as ‘theatre machines’, with a particular focus on George Devine’s 1964 production of *Play*. Following an analysis of the Fail Better’s *Discords* (2010), Beckettian embodiment is articulated as ‘organic machinery’. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Beckett’s ‘corporeal hereditaments’ and ‘plasticity’ in performance. Chapter 2 investigates Artaudian ‘theatre laboratories’, in particular Peter Brook’s 1964 *Theatre of Cruelty* experiments. This is compared with Fail Better’s interdisciplinary project *Endlessness* (2011). The final section develops an analysis of ‘scientific’ theatre and experimentation-as-performance, focusing particularly on forms of ‘reflexivity’. Chapter 3 examines participatory performance, specifically focusing on corporeal movement within installations such as *Fail Better Fragments* (2012). Joan Littlewood’s experimental performance practices are analyzed, specifically her *Fun Palace* project (c.1961–8), for the influence of Rudolf Laban upon her work. The potential for community engagement within these ‘experimental playgrounds’ will be explored in relation to ‘permeability’ in performance and Laban’s ‘effort attitude’ of flow.

Finally, the thesis re-articulates the ‘three problems’ in terms of *play* and *discipline*, which are interrogated via the concepts of failure, ludus, and embodiment. I will demonstrate how a historiographical approach to PaR can re-invigorate methodology, before considering transdisciplinary performance in relation to ‘playfulness’ and Csikszentmihalyi’s ‘flow’. The thesis concludes by briefly developing an understanding of performances as ‘epistemic things’, PaR as ‘unfinished thinking’, and experimental theatre practice as a transdisciplinary phenomenon of ‘not-yet-knowing’.

Introduction



Figure 0.1: Play Without a Title (2008)

[See FBF video (edit) at 00m 45s on CD-Rom]

This is not the theatre.

(Garcia Lorca, *Play Without a Title*, 2008 [1936])

Trying to learning to use words, and every attempt / Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure

(Eliot, *East Coker*, 1963 [1940])

We are ourselves that performance; we perform and are performed every moment.

(Hassan, *Prometheus as Performer*, 1977)

I. A Different Kind of Failure

My research began with a ‘formless hunch’ (Brook, 1987: 3) rather than the framing of a question. In response to Baz Kershaw’s definition of PaR as ‘a method and methodology in search of results across disciplines: a collection of *transdisciplinary* research “tools”’ (2009: 5), I conducted practical experiments that crossed disciplinary boundaries (including the arts, humanities, sciences and philosophy). My argument therefore engages with experimental theatre practice in order to address performance per se, specifically in relation to transdisciplinarity. While theatre has been one of the greatest resources for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary encounters between the arts and the sciences (Shepherd-Barr, 2006), it has also failed to be systematically transdisciplinary. As I will demonstrate below, British theatre in the late modernist period has tended towards a disciplinarity that foregrounds mechanical, scientific and experimental process, while performance practice facilitated an organic, theatrical and playful approach to epistemology. Instead, performance ‘irritates’ theatre (Read, 2013), contesting disciplinarity through radical failure (Kershaw, 1999; Bailes, 2011) while paradoxically asserting ‘the challenge to perform—or else’ (McKenzie, 2001: 139). I will discuss the re-valorization of failure within ludic practice alongside PaR on Beckett, Artaud and Laban, which will allow the thesis to move beyond a straightforward distinction between theatre and performance.

For Alan Read: ‘The canonization of performance as all that is “good”... was undoubtedly a necessary step to unsettle all that was normative in the orthodoxies of a dominant culture’ (2013: xvi). I will argue that both performance and transdisciplinarity enable cultural and epistemological transgressions through their focus upon practitioner knowledge, problem solving and failure as a form of resistance. As Sara Jane Bailes notes in *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* (2011): ‘Failure challenges the cultural dominance of instrumental rationality and the fictions of continuity that bind the way we

imagine and manufacture the world' (2). With Bailes, I will use Beckett's 'failure' as an example of radical failure from a performance studies perspective, but I will extend this notion to include arguments concerning failure within the construction of scientific facts and the reflexivity of laboratory experiments. In doing so, I will draw more carefully upon earlier observations about Beckett's practice that foregrounded the corporeality of his theatrical embodiments (Pountney, 1976; Chabert, 1982) as well as more recent scholarship in Beckett studies (Maude, 2009; McMullan, 2010).

Within this thesis, I will trace an experimental corporeality even further back to the performance cultures of late modernism (e.g. Artaud c.1932, Laban c.1947 or Blin c.1953) by taking a historiographical approach to the PaR methodology. I will discuss some 1960s experimental theatres as a 'scientific' turn in performance practice, paradoxically combining ludic processes with laboratory reflexivity. I am therefore re-reading the 'theatre laboratories' of the 1960s as a locus of exchange between modernist cultures and the contemporary technological age. In doing so, I am re-orientating my own practice in relation to this legacy and contributing to a process of historicizing PaR (Riley and Hunter, 2009; Fleishman, 2012). This line of inquiry will be particularly concerned with what constitutes a 'laboratory' after Grotowski's influence, which for Riley: 'can be seen as an attempt to theorize (perhaps legitimize – perhaps protect) theatre arts from a modern scientific perspective' (2009: 140).

Another line of inquiry will concern the paradoxical qualities of performance, which emerge within the thesis as 'three problems'. Each problem exposes a transdisciplinary phenomenon: the *organic/mechanical*, the *theatrical/scientific* and the *playful/experimental*. These polarities will enable a sustained analysis of experimental embodiment as a catalyst for transdisciplinarity across the practical case studies. While I will be trying to pin down shifting definitions of multidisciplinary practice (in Chapter 1) and interdisciplinary collaboration (in Chapter 2), I will privilege the '*trans-disciplinary*' in

(Chapter 3 and the Conclusion). I am therefore using transdisciplinarity as an evolving epistemological position which, for Robert Frodeman: '[is] actually a more crucial term than interdisciplinarity in understanding our current situation' (2014: 7). For Julie Thompson Klein:

Transdisciplinarity was defined as a common system of axioms that transcends the narrow scope of disciplinary worldviews through an overarching synthesis, such as anthropology construed as the science of humans... Piaget treated it as a higher state in the epistemology of interdisciplinary relationships based on reciprocal assimilations (Thompson Klein in Frodeman et al., 2010: 24)

Thompson Klein goes on to introduce 'four major trendlines' that anatomize transdisciplinarity. Firstly: 'the contemporary version of the historical quest for systematic integration of knowledge' (24), from ancient Greek philosophy to 'unification theories' in Physics. Secondly, 'Transdisciplinarity is not just "transcendent" but "transgressive"... more often as a label for knowledge formations imbued with a critical imperative, fostering new theoretical paradigms [e.g. cultural studies]' (25). Thirdly: 'overarching synthetic paradigms... that transcend the narrow scope of disciplinary worldviews [e.g. sociobiology or phenomenology]' and finally: 'trans-sector problem solving [in, for example] contexts of environmental research' (25).

I understand Thompson Klein's 'trendlines' as four entangled pathways towards transdisciplinarity, and I will echo Frodeman in suggesting that this represents a more sustainable approach to 'knowledge production' within the modern university. With Katri Huutoniemi, I acknowledge the critique that: 'a complementary trend is the "transdisciplinarization" of knowledge, the erosion of the distinction between academic and non-academic contexts of research' (315). However, Huutoniemi advocates: 'a form of integrated societal values that emphasizes comprehensive knowledge responsive to political and social needs' (315) by foregrounding *practice*.

Within this context, my PaR specifically engages with the locality of the Warwick campus environment, via three strands of inquiry: a) experimental theatre, b) transdisciplinary performance and, more generally, c) ludic practice. Each of these areas will be addressed in detail within the thesis, especially the ways in which they concern human embodiment. Specifically, these areas operate upon an inter-relationship between the *disciplinary* and the *ludic*, which I will articulate in terms of ‘flow experience’ (cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Ultimately, I will be interested in how these modes of human embodiment produce ‘flow experiences’ that challenge logo-centric epistemologies.

My thesis will argue that PaR enacts ‘a productive not-yet-knowing’ (Borgdorff, 2012: 194) which I will articulate via three modes of human embodiment:

- a) **Experimental theatre** of the 1960s, including the practices of George Devine, Peter Brook and Joan Littlewood (in particular, their productive failures relating to theatrical aesthetics);
- b) **Transdisciplinary performance** processes influenced by Samuel Beckett, Antonin Artaud and Rudolf Laban (examples will be drawn from both the 1960s and contemporary practice);
- c) **Ludic practice** as a research method in PaR experiments conducted by Fail Better Productions in the 2010s (three projects that re-iterate the historiographical problems identified above).

On the wider subject of failure, I will mobilize two academic traditions which can be broadly distinguished as ‘the philosophical’ (on failure and epistemology) and ‘the performative’ (on failure and aesthetics). In the philosophical tradition, there has been an understanding of failure as central to knowledge acquisition since the Pre-Socratics, which re-emerged as the scientific method in the seventeenth century and was later remodeled by Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn in the twentieth century. Popper and Kuhn spawned a reflexive movement within the 1960s study of science that insisted on the value of failure within experimental epistemologies, which has in turn influenced the work of Bruno Latour and Hans-Jorg Rheinberger. This philosophical tradition has

tended to view failure as progressive, deploying ‘falsifiability’ within scientific discourse and regarding ‘trial and error’ as central its research processes.

In a counter – though not unrelated – tradition, performance studies scholars have drawn upon the avant-garde practices of late modernism to establish an aesthetic interest in failure as a subject of study and a critical strategy that foregrounds counter-hegemonic cultural experience. In a 1990s movement known playfully as ‘failure studies’, scholars and practitioners (e.g. Tim Etchells, Matthew Goulish, Adrian Heathfield, Sara Jane Bailes) emphasized performance events that privileged – and possibly encouraged – failure as a phenomenon in its own right. My argument brings these two traditions together, via Beckett, whose failure was ‘ever failed’ and ‘better worse’, as he wrote in his prose poem *Worstward Ho* (1983). I will conclude with a reflection upon laboratory processes (whether artistic, scientific or both) by developing Borgdorff’s ‘not-yet-knowing’ (2012: 194)¹ towards a model of experimental theatre as transdisciplinary performance.

Each chapter of this thesis will therefore identify an experimental problem that will be explored through laboratory practice. The ‘theatre laboratory’ emerges as a core process for this thesis, in which mechanical rehearsal (*Play/Discords*), experimental practice (*Endlessness/Theatre of Cruelty*) and participatory performance (*Fun Palace/Fail Better Fragments*) will collectively be explored as laboratories. As Mirella Schino informs us in *Alchemists of the Stage: Theatre Laboratories in Europe* (2009):

Theatre laboratories were a significant innovation of twentieth-century European theatre. This innovation was however merely a new face of the much older and more remote zone of theatrical

¹ Borgdorff explains how ‘things we *want to know* (epistemic things) [can] at other times be objects *through which we know* (technical objects). Rheinberger speaks in this context of a synchronic intertwinement of the epistemic and the technical, and of a diachronic intertwinement of difference and reproduction’ (2012: 190). I will be interested in the intertwinement (or *entanglement*) of the epistemic and technical in performance practice, e.g. how documentation can be technical, at first, then epistemic, much later.

creation: the space that exists between art and life, between the craft and the person. Right from the start, theatre laboratories were something of a paradox. (7)

This paradox will be further elaborated via my three problems – the *organic/mechanical*, the *theatrical/scientific* and the *playful/experimental* – across the three chapters that I will now introduce, before a final section on methodology.

II. From *Play* to *Discords*

Chapter 1 investigates two specific instances of Beckettian experimentation, Devine's British premiere of *Play* in 1964 and Fail Better Productions' *Discords* in 2010. It will respond to W2's question in Samuel Beckett's *Play*, articulating the performing body in terms of a reflexive mechanism, and M's body as 'a *something* machine' (Beckett, 1964: 12). This metaphor will be recycled across the chapter, to illustrate ensembles in rehearsal as 'theatre machines' and PaR scholars as 'research machines'. In doing so, the enduring ephemeral/material binary will be examined in relation to scholarly materials including Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003). This discursive process will take account of theatre history (specifically Devine's early productions of Beckett's plays) and new performance experiments (specifically my own Fail Better projects). The methodology for this approach adapts the 'textual genetics' represented by critical studies such as Stanley Gontarski's *The Intent of Undoing* (1985) and Rosemary Pountney's *Theatre of Shadows* (1988), into a new model for Beckett Studies as 'performance genetics'.

The genetic study of performance, as advocated by Josette Feral et al. (2008), focuses upon: 'the phases of the staging's constructive work; the research carried out by the actor on his or her text; and the hesitations, erasures, choices and discoveries generated by a collective work are fundamental to comprehending the representation' (223). To establish a theatrical context for this analysis, I will first consider the

biomechanical body in performance, before a consideration of Beckettian rehearsal within this lineage. I am especially aware that ‘rehearsal in Beckett suggests a paradox’ (McCarthy, 1996: 150), a paradox first articulated by Anna McMullan as a tension between ‘authority and failure’ (1994), and elaborated upon by Jane Goodall: ‘Beckett’s plays don’t require a dry academic correctness of their interpreters, but they do demand this level of discipline and intensity. The paradox must enter the actor’s bones’ (in Gontarski and Ullman, 2006: 195). Writing more recently, McMullan revisits the Beckettian body ‘not as a stable historical entity’ (2010: 5), but rather as an embodied psychoanalytical and phenomenological subject. Her argument builds upon Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and most notably Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to develop a new understanding of embodiment, inter-corporeality and ‘ontological doubleness’ (13). For McMullan, the body in Beckett: ‘is presented as both sign and site, engine or matrix of production (of stories, semblances, voice, footfalls or hiccups) and fabric to be composed and recomposed with limited materials’ (2010: 125). Viewing the body as ‘itself a matrix of embodiments... a site of production’ (126) has enabled my thesis to treat human embodiment as an experimental process, rather than a stable entity.

Writing on *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (1985), Joseph Roach first recalls how seventeenth and eighteenth century authors constructed a modernist frame through which to view the paradoxical nature of theatrical embodiment. If the reflex is ‘the essential mechanism of organic response’ (199), then the paradoxical substance of performance is the human body as ‘reflex machine’; something that Roach proposes in his survey of ‘the science of acting’. His text draws upon Denis Diderot, Charles Darwin, Constantin Stanislavski, and Vsevolod Meyerhold; the latter positioned ‘the human organism as an automative mechanism’ (202) in his 1922 ‘Program of Biomechanics’. Roach particularly focuses on Diderot’s ‘blunt thesis’ *Le paradoxe sur le comédien* from 1773, and re-articulates these paradoxes of sensibility: ‘the art of acting in

light of his vitalistic materialism... [the synthesis of] the vitalistic and mechanistic explanations of the actor's body' (1993: 117). Comparably, my specific inquiry into Beckett's practice, via the archive and through the body in rehearsal, will alight upon Brook's 'theatre machines' and Foucault's 'disciplinary mechanisms'. Roach's treatment of Diderot is especially useful here: 'he alternatively sustained and provoked both parties by using metaphors derived equally from machinery and organisms' (117).

There will follow here a meditation upon both *mechanisms* and *organisms* in order to introduce both the corporeality of Beckett's *Play* (in the 1964 rehearsal process) and the materiality of *Discords* (in the 2010 devising process). Both processes explored the body as a pre-determined and behavioural entity, which Roach would call 'a biological machine' (160). In this sense both Beckett and his theatrical collaborators, as well as our experimental ensemble, were responding to modernist paradigms of theatrical embodiment, such as this notable example from Roach: 'in *The Actor and the Ubermarionette* of 1908, Edward Gordon Craig insisted that the normal human body had utterly failed as the instrument of theatrical art' (160). Roach also positions this work in relation to the late writings of Charles Darwin on human emotion (177), and Craig's admiration for the rigour of rehearsal at the Moscow Art Theatre (194). Rehearsal in this model emerges as a highly disciplinary practice, routinely making use of experts in specific aspects of production (voice, movement, direction), conditioning the performer to enact prescribed actions, sometimes with instruction from a variety of disciplinary specialists.

For Roach, 'modern biology' for Stanislavski and Craig, as much as for Diderot and Darwin before them, promised to finally resolve 'the mystery of the player's passion' (1993: 194). Here, it can be argued that, in a parallel tradition, Artaud, Blin and Brook – practitioners of both cruel and holy theatres – seek to *distill* rather than *decode* this mystery. Their machines, unlike Roach's machinery, are bound up in the manufacture of mystery and play, in order to expose an intensity of passion, the energy of discipline,

rather than a disciplinary mechanism. I will argue that the network of practice identified by Roach (from Diderot to Meyerhold) continued to evolve throughout the late modernist and contemporary periods of theatre. I will position my own practice as a way of constructing the body through its practical applications, with special reference to Beckett whose: ‘mimes and... dramatic fragments constituted laboratories in which [he] tried out the possibilities of staging the body or a series of bodies’ (McMullan, 2010: 57).

These ‘laboratories’ create a process of embodied damage and repair, especially through the mechanisms of experimental theatre practice. If the body for Diderot and Roach enacted a metaphor of both ‘machinery and organism’ then this argument must also consider the modernist legacies of early neurology, when Santiago Ramon y Cajal identified the nervous system as ‘organic machinery’ (1904) as well as the influence of contemporary neurologists such as Antonio Demasio and philosophers of neuroscience such as Catherine Malabou. It is from these perspectives that I will position Beckettian performance practices as *multidisciplinary* (where many *disciplines* inform cultural practices).

As I stated earlier, a paradoxical feature of the theatre laboratory (a tension between the *theatrical* and the *scientific*) will be explored in Chapter 2; however, I have found a comparable tension in Beckett’s ‘theatre machines’. Within the theatre machine, the body is ‘a matrix of embodiments... a site of production’ (McMullan, 2010: 126) where ‘paradox must enter the actor’s bones’ (Goodall, 2006: 195). In Laban’s ‘movement analysis’ there is a similar tension - between *free* and *bound* flow - which I will explore in relation to participatory theatre in my third chapter. Each of these approaches combines the *mechanical* with the *organic* in order to experiment with theatrical form. I examined this paradox in my practical research on Beckett’s dramaturgy then I applied this work to original devised performance. The highly disciplinary nature of Beckett in performance therefore informed multidisciplinary PaR on Beckett, which has especially focused upon the *plasticity of performance*.

III. From *Theatre of Cruelty* to *Endlessness*

Chapter 2 investigates Brook's practice during the *ToC* experiments (also 1964), as an example of the interdisciplinary *theatrical/scientific* problem. I will re-consider this problem through my PaR project *Endlessness* (2011) and make special reference to the influence of Artaud upon experimental theatre about science. I will compare and contrast two 'theatre laboratories': an archival process, using production materials held at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT), and published texts by Marowitz and Brook; and a practical process, using experimental methods, digital documentation and audience feedback. The chapter will describe both laboratory processes in detail, so as to articulate interdisciplinary issues concerning the exploration of 'scientific' ideas in performance. Brook's own 'scientific research' re-interpreted Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' (1932) as strictness, self-discipline and elimination.

Brook made several attempts to highlight the importance of total subsidy for experiments of this nature (see Williams, 1988; Brook, 1998; Kustow, 2005). In the *ToC* programme note, the company positions its work as follows: 'As with a scientific research project, an experiment like the *ToC* needs total subsidy; that is enough money to cover costs even if no tickets were sold. Only in this way can it work in relaxation and freedom' (SMT/PROG/1964/40). There is a comparison to be drawn here between the subsidy of Brook's experiments, and my own PaR within the academy. As I have made clear earlier, most of the practice discussed in this thesis was funded for the purposes of research and/or education (at the University of Warwick). The final section of this Introduction will address the problems of translating artistic practice into university-based research, especially in relation to the complexity that this introduces to both practice and research. I will argue that this work has a radical potential to produce unexpected outcomes and, sometimes, transdisciplinary innovation.

I will be particularly interested in the ‘scientific’ orientation of Brook’s performances within an experimental context. In an essay in their programme, Brook and Marowitz write: ‘*ToC* is a collage, a form of surrealist revue composed of shots in the dark, shots at distant targets... Our hope is that this season will provide the conditions for experiment and trial-or-error [*sic*].’ (SMT/PROG/1964/40). ‘Contributors to experimental group presentations’ included Paul Ableman, John Arden, Antonin Artaud, Ray Bradbury, Peter Brook, Cyril Connolly, Jean Genet, Alfred Jarry, Charles Marowitz, Alain Robbe-Grillet, William Shakespeare and, satirically, the Lord Chamberlain. However, the influence of Artaud on the event was deeply significant. Brook and Marowitz suggest ‘Artaud’s longing for a rediscovery of the terror and awesomeness of the original semi-religious theatre [was] a desperate attempt to find a way in which theatre could once more become necessary, an urgent presence in our lives’ (40). They propose to restore this necessity through experimentation, drawing upon the ‘Elizabethan Example’:

From one point of view, Artaud’s ‘cruelty’ can be seen as an attempt to recover the Shakespearean variety of expression by other means, and this Royal Shakespeare experiment, using Artaud’s work as a springboard rather than a model for slavish reconstruction, can also be viewed as a search for a theatre-language as agile and penetrating as the Elizabethans created.
(SMT/PROG/1964/40)

Indeed, the oxymoronic notion of a ‘Royal Shakespearean experiment’ began with ‘two landmarks: Jarry and Artaud... [and] the current of Cruelty is pursued into our own day either with the help of specially written texts, or by the presentation of rehearsal and exercise items’ (40). Brook positions Artaud as a visionary throughout his writing and his biographer Michael Kustow (also Literary Advisor on the *ToC* experiments), explains this impact as follows:

The young Brook would have heard about Artaud in his trips to Paris in the 1950s, when in avant-garde circles Artaud had cast himself as a revolutionary martyr in the cause of modern art – Artaud Agonistes, surfacing from months of electro-shock therapy to write his late, hectoring texts and to have his final radio play, *An End to the Judgment of God*, banned by French state radio. (2005: 138)

As I will show in Chapter 2, Kimberley Jannarone (2010) and others have disputed Brook's faithfulness to Artaud. As Read notes: 'Artaud and Grotowski cannot be blamed for the use of their work since the time they wrote it' (2008: 58-9). He continues: 'Instead of a "Theatre of Cruelty", a question of cruelty, its distribution and arrangements might be posed; instead of aesthetically mimicking *Towards a Poor Theatre*, a question of poverty, its means and effects might be at issue' (67). Borrowing this approach, I draw a distinction between Artaud's theatre and Artaudian theatre, as I did earlier between Beckett's theatre and Beckettian theatre. This allows me to consider how Artaud and Beckett's projects are re-performed in the work of other practitioners, and how that may impact upon subsequent performance research. In order to identify these differences, I explore the specific material circumstances of theatre practice. For example, take Kustow's account of the *ToC* experiments:

They had twelve weeks in all for training and for a five-week showing of work in progress at LAMDA theatre in Kensington. They explored sounds, banging and scraping objects, seeing how much variety they could make; they worked with rhythms, both the rhythms of their percussive objects, and then their voices and bodies; they began to use a sound and a movement to respond to a new situation. Soon they ran into the limitations of purely formal experiments. "Very quickly, frighteningly quickly, actors became as glib with non-naturalistic sounds and movements as they were with stock dramatic clichés," wrote Marowitz. (2005: 140)

This description identifies a problem that I explore in the second chapter. The difficult relationship between the *scientific* and *theatrical* will emerge as a paradox that characterizes theatre laboratories in particular. This ‘scientific’ turn in theatre practice can be traced back to the 1920s studios of Russian modernism, but its apotheosis was in the experimental theatre practices of mid- to late twentieth-century Europe.² However, Brook’s laboratory was clearly a place where ‘purely formal experiments’ failed to convey the theatricality of Artaud that fascinated him. Brook had to find alternative ways of sharing the experiments with an audience. As Kustow also tells us: ‘Sometimes Brook and Marowitz went on stage to discuss why they were doing the whole thing, or Brook rehearsed a Shakespeare scene – one night a scene from *Richard III*’ (141). The founding principles of laboratory science (of making ‘things’ speak) may be betrayed if the experimenter feels the need to explain himself. As I will show with my own *Endlessness* experiments, the urge to explain the conditions of the laboratory can overwhelm the process of rigorous testing.

The PaR experimentation discussed in this chapter contrasts Brook’s notion of ‘elimination’ (2013) alongside Artaudian ‘cruelty’ in order to address the possibility of conducting ‘scientific research’ in performance. I will compare both the archival and the practical processes in order to explore the notion that a PaR methodology is ‘quasi-scientific’ (in the sense that it mobilizes a discourse without its methods). I will also consider the ways in which the PaR makes use of scientific terminology and technical vocabulary in a performative, rather than epistemic, mode. I will also address the criticism that PaR privileges *techné* by considering the hybridity of its praxis and its paradoxical relationship with the scientific method (cf. Nelson, 2013). Within the context of twenty-first century ‘science theatre’, Chapter 2 will also develop ideas from

²See for example ‘The Laboratory Theatre Network’ of the Centre for Performance Research (Aberystwyth), which has recently convened a group that includes the Grotowski Institute, Odin Teatret/Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, and the Hemispheric Institute (SCUDD, 2015).

performance scholars including Sue-Ellen Case (2006) and Helen Nicholson (2011) to construct a more nuanced understanding of ‘scientific’ performance. This analysis will also draw upon ideas of ‘science on stage’ (Shepherd-Barr, 2006) and earlier accounts of the arts and sciences as ‘two cultures’ (C.P. Snow, 1959). These issues will be explored through my PaR project *Endlessness* (2011), especially its attempt to use scientific source material as stimulus for contemporary devised theatre.

In their discussion about theatre laboratories, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary for Odin Teatret, Schino et al. posed the question: ‘Why a theatre laboratory?’³ They have various answers: ‘Of course a laboratory theatre is different from a simple experimental theatre’ (2009: 28); ‘the laboratory, we said, is a *parallel dimension* of the theatre’ (29); ‘a theatre laboratory is a protected milieu where time is plentiful’ (29); ‘a laboratory is a place of pure research’ (30); ‘thus a laboratory is a theatre that says *no* to performance’ (30). However, Brook and Marowitz characterized their laboratory very differently indeed:

Why are we showing this experiment to an audience? Because no theatre experience is complete without that third element, because we need their reactions, we want to see how far we stir their ideas. We need them to test their reactions just as much as we test our actions.

(SMT/PROG/1964/40)

The *ToC* laboratory was incomplete without an audience, and this element informed my own *Endlessness* project, although inviting observers into an experiment introduced yet more complexity into the process. As we shall see, the observation of phenomena *affects* the very same phenomena. For Henk Borgdorff: ‘an artistic “fact”, like a scientific, social, or historical fact, is what we make real with our epistemological undertakings’ (2012:

³ A conference on the same theme was sub-titled ‘Risks and Innovations in Europe 1898–1999’ and took place in Aarhus, 4–6 October 2004.

195). As he reminds us that: ‘Artistic and scientific research is about something real, while simultaneously transforming it into what it could be’ (196). In doing so, he reveals the interdisciplinary – arguably transdisciplinary – problem of practical experimentation, which is shared between the arts and sciences. His writing on the provisionality of experimental knowledge is drawn upon the work of others, from Bruno Latour to Hans-Jorg Rheinberger. I will consider various ‘science studies’ perspectives in Chapter 2, but I would like to return to PaR here. For Borgdorff: ‘The condition of art as research is a condition of contingency. The openness of art is what invites us, again and again, to see things differently’ (196). He also positions artistic practice as ‘unfinished thinking’ (194), which is something that I will return to later. *Endlessness* will emerge as the strongest example of this ‘unfinished thinking’, where the *theatrical* and the *scientific* coalesce in ‘work-in-progress’ performance. This will allow me to position my PaR experiments as critically interdisciplinary, especially when they exemplify the *reflexivity of performance*.

IV. From *Fun Palace* to *Fail Better Fragments*

Chapter 3 explores Joan Littlewood’s *Fun Place* project (c.1961–1968), positioning her ‘laboratory of fun’ within an evolution of Rudolf Laban’s work on human movement. The transdisciplinary dimension emerges from this account of participatory performance and its influence upon my PaR project *Fail Better Fragments* (2012). By accentuating the influence of Laban on Littlewood, specifically his ‘effort’ attitudes, this chapter also considers human movement as transdisciplinary inquiry in its own right. Drawing upon ‘ludic’ theories of learning (Huizinga, 1949; Sutton-Smith 2001; Bateson and Martin, 2013), it analyses participatory performance as ‘knowledge gathering’. It deals with the evolution of Laban’s work on *Effort* (with FC Lawrence, 1947) in Littlewood’s practice, and in the subsequent work of Lisa Ullmann and Jean Newlove. From this analysis, specific questions emerge for research methods in performance concerning the shifting

definitions of ‘the archive and the repertoire’ (see Taylor, 2003), as well as Littlewood’s appropriation of university, laboratory and play spaces for the future of performance.

It is important to my argument that the *Fun Palace* project is understood in relation to Littlewood’s later practice regarding playgrounds. This builds upon the research of Nadine Holdsworth, who begins her final chapter of *Joan Littlewood’s Theatre* (2011) with an anonymous *Stratford Express* article from 1967, quoting Littlewood: ‘I’ve finished with putting on plays. I don’t like the theatre... at the moment I’m more interested in my children’s playground’ (234). Having established that: ‘throughout the 1960s, Littlewood battled to raise awareness of, interest in and financial support for the Fun Palace Project that Price estimated would cost two and a half to three million pounds’ (226), Holdsworth concludes that ‘her willingness to contemplate “spatial play” and her ethical concern with how cultural and educational processes might be activated within the community’ (233) still inform cultural practices in the twenty-first century. I will also draw upon the work of Robert Leach, who describes this period as follows:

Littlewood herself had become increasingly excited by the possibility of creating what she called a ‘Fun Palace’, a kind of twentieth-century equivalent to the eighteenth-century pleasure gardens, but contained within an extraordinary changeable and changing building designed by the visionary architect, Cedric Price. (Leach, 2006: 201)

As Mary Louise Lobsinger informs us: [when Littlewood met Price] ‘he was teaching at the Architectural Association, socializing within a circle of young aspiring architects with a penchant for technology, and was acquainted with the architectural critic Reyner Banham’ (2000: 119).⁴ Lobsinger variously describes the *Fun Palace* concept as ‘a machine capable of adapting to the needs of users... the quintessential anti-architectural project’ (120) and ‘a barrier-free venue for experimental theater’ (122). My focus in Chapter 3 will

⁴ Reyner Banham (1922–88) was influenced by the Futurists and associated with New Brutalism.

be on the *Fun Palace* as ‘a “university of the streets” with a strong community link’ (Leach, 2006: 201) as I will argue that the emphasis on learning *through* play is a Laban-like aspect of Littlewood’s practice. While ‘the very word “fun”, deliberately used to be provocative by Littlewood, may have doomed the project’ (201), Laban’s generic focus on human movement as an inclusive practice, and his specific focus on human effort as an interpretative tool, allows ‘fun’ to be educative. His focus on playful movement as a human intelligence, positions the ludic impulse as pedagogically, and even philosophically, significant (see *A Vision of Dynamic Space*, Ullmann, 1984).

As Dick McCaw notes: ‘Laban was not interested in the externally observed movement but rather the meaning – ethical, aesthetic, pedagogical – of that moment in relation to the person who is moving’ (2011: 333).⁵ While Laban’s influences on Littlewood’s theatre practice was well documented by Leach and others, less impact is noted regarding her ludic projects, other than in Holdsworth’s account. However, a strong connection between play and meaning can also be found by focusing on the flowing movement enabled by effort work. For Laban: ‘the flow of effort from the weightless, timeless, spaceless centre to the matter shaped and moved around is the binding link which carries life’ (Ullmann, 1984: 24). I return to flow later in the thesis.

I will also make critical use the autobiographical *Joan’s Book* (1994), where Laban is the practitioner Littlewood turns to most readily; Stanislavski and Brecht are hardly mentioned at all. Across its copious pages, she demonstrates the indispensability of Laban and his teachings, although the chronology is sometimes confusing. Nonetheless, Laban clearly informs her practice from her brief spell at RADA to her final work on playgrounds. She seems impressed by Laban’s early years as ‘a crystallographer and a Dadaist’ (69) and concerned about his flight from Nazi-Germany, ‘what had happened to

⁵ Laban’s ‘ethical, aesthetic, pedagogic’ understanding of movement has a parallel with Cedric Price’s understanding of architecture as a social and ethical practice (see Holdsworth, 2011).

Rudolf Laban?’ (120). Following their first meetings after the war in Manchester and Blackburn – ‘the industrial north appealed to Laban’ (181) – she recalls the introduction of ‘Laban’s dancing star, Jean Newlove’ (215) to Littlewood’s company, who soon became ‘our new dancing mistress’ (219). The book also contains Gerry Raffles’ proposal for a new theatre school in Liverpool (‘Joan would head the project, assisted by Laban’, 307) and Harry Corbett’s comment that Theatre Workshop was ‘the only company that trains’, leading to him being sent ‘on a Laban crash course’ (454) with Ullmann. In these memories of Theatre Workshop, Laban’s ‘mastery of movement’ is clearly one guiding principle (see Ullmann, 1984: 6). Howard Gooney, writing about the period 1948–50, states that: ‘many hard and useful movement classes were held in the Arts of Movement Studio in Oxford Road [Manchester] – the Laban Studios, run by Lisa Ullmann and Sylvia Bodmer, some of the classes being taken by Rudolf Laban himself’ (1981: 66). From these reflections, it can be safely assumed that Laban and his associates profoundly influenced the movement practice of Theatre Workshop and Littlewood’s subsequent projects.

In Laban they had a found a researching practitioner who understood that: ‘Man’s body-engine is constructed in a manner that in principle all imaginable effort-combinations can be performed with relative ease and balance’ (Laban in McCaw, 2011: 224). This compression of *playful/experimental* effort as one, allows practices discussed in Chapter 3 to inform my Conclusion, so as to elucidate theories of play and their relationship to ‘flow experience’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Within Chapter 3, I will discuss the oscillation both free-flow and bound-flow in relation to human movement. Therefore, I will explore the potential empowerment through corporeal movement in projects such as *Fun Palace*, *Learn-to-Play* and *Everyone’s an Actor, Shakespeare Said* (all relating to Littlewood c.1961–68). In these processes of empowerment, the participant is enabled to be simultaneously *playful* and *experimental*.

I will explore playful experimentation and experimental play through my PaR project *Fail Better Fragments* (2012) when we explored free-flow and bound-flow in performance. Like the 1960s *Fun Palace* (designed by Cedric Price), our structure (designed by Nomi Overall) created a performance installation for participation. Both Laban's 'flow', Littlewood's 'fun' and Fail Better's 'fragments' combined to enable transdisciplinary research, especially when the *permeability of performance* extended playfulness. In Chapter 3, I will introduce a comparison between the experience of flow in playful behavior and the use of free/bound 'flow' in movement analysis.

V. PaR, Methodology and Entanglement

I will use this final section to articulate the reflexivity of PaR by developing my key terms and concepts in preparation for the chapters themselves. I will briefly explore how recent scholarly models have failed to move beyond the notion of 'crossroads' in theatre and performance studies (e.g. Pavis, 1992; Conquergood, 2002; Fischer-Lichte, 2003) and trouble binary separations between theoretical/practical, historical/contemporary, and artistic/scientific. By moving towards an understanding of PaR as transdisciplinary, I will argue that established metaphors confuse research methods in both problematic (e.g. 'crossroads') and transformative (e.g. 'entanglement') ways. I will challenge metaphors that globalise theatre and performance studies, and instead develop a specific and localised imagery that articulates PaR through its specificity. This argument will emphasize the special *reflexivity* of PaR, which enhances the *plasticity* of creative processes (see Chapter 1) and the *permeability* of participatory praxis (see Chapter 3). It therefore resists the temptation to objectify this research as 'knowledge production', instead arguing for an entangled approach to methodology that aims to take full account of its own complexity. Hence I hope to show that the *plasticity/reflexivity/permeability of*

performance (three concepts further developed in the chapters) can emerge from practical research methods through the analysis of their documentation as a discursive inquiry.

Theatre studies has deployed the ‘crossroads’ metaphor for some time now (it has been waiting at this intersection for at least twenty years). If a *metaphor* is: ‘the application of a name or descriptive term or phrase to an object or action to which it is imaginatively but not literally applicable’ (*OED*, 1998: 856), then this example promotes inaction and indecision. When Dwight Conquergood urged us to refuse: ‘the deeply entrenched division of labor, apartheid of knowledges, that plays out inside the academy as the difference between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualising and creating’, he insisted that ‘our radical move is to turn, and return, insistently, to the crossroads’ (2002: 154). At the turn of the millennium, it seemed that PaR already had a response to this disciplinary problem:

Conquergood’s full-frontal assault on the modernist traditions of knowledge-making may be an overstatement, but it does suggest something of what could be at stake through practice as research, and not just in performance studies. In all the disciplines represented here, we may be at a watershed, the negotiation of which might well determine their place and purposes in university for decades to come. (Kershaw and Piccini, 2004: 87)

I suggest that PaR has responded to this problem over the last decade in two ways.

Firstly, the expectation that PaR would trouble ‘knowledge production’ has been exemplified by its impact upon new doctoral programmes, modes of scholarly publication and forms of university assessment. The reflexivity of PaR process has also complicated the temporal and spatial conventions normally placed upon doctoral candidates (the student may complete their thesis according to a different timescale and the outcomes may involve controversial formats). As predicted by Kershaw and Piccini, PaR is still radical in 2014: ‘These outcomes are characterized by significant levels of

reflexivity with regard to the epistemological, ontological and procedural dimensions of PaR, consequent upon its potentially radical approach to questions of knowledge production in the universities' (2004: 87). Writing in connection with the PARIP project (2000-2006), they looked forward in the new century to when practice-based research may have equal status with theoretical-analytical models. They state: 'PaR knowledges may – like all good research – be best conceived as context-specific and relational, in the sense of being created at the *intersections* of existing forms, through response to previous iterations within specific (and identifiable) webs of citation' (89, emphasis added). PaR practitioner-scholars often emphasized the intersectional nature of their work, recalling Conquergood (2002) and deploying the metaphor of the 'crossroads' repeatedly (Pavis, 1992; Conquergood, 2002; Fischer-Lichte, 2003; Brady and Walsh, 2009; Freeman, 2010; and 'Practice and research at the crossroads' at ResCen, Middlesex University, 2014). For example, Fintan Walsh and Sara Brady have argued for 'the phenomenological value of being between states that is of special interest to performance studies' (2009: 2) in relation to its 'crossroads' within Irish culture. This disciplinary obsession with the crossroads has emerged as one of its greatest clichés, which sometimes prevents scholars from engaging with specific flows and particular material conditions. I suggest that the 'intersection' itself is a fairly unremarkable aspect of PaR and performance research.

Secondly, PaR has opened up more unpredictable outcomes since Kershaw and Piccini first acknowledged: 'the contested role of documentation [for PaR] in the demand for an archive-friendly artefact from the funders of creative practices, rooted in the politics of accountability and transparency' (2004: 89). PaR communities have focused their methodological discussions on the details of documentation (e.g. IFTR PaR Working Group, discussed below). This has proven, perhaps, to be the only shared concern of a very diverse community of researchers working across multiple media and in many parts of the globe. The hybridity of this methodology has been its greatest

problem since the late twentieth century. David Whitton, for example, has complained that PaR is solipsistic: ‘rather than constituting an identifiable methodology, PaR actually denotes an expansion in multiple directions simultaneously, in other words an expansion of the range of possibilities open to researchers’ (2009: 86). Whitton misses the point, I think, that this ‘expansion’ actually mimics the hybridity of theatre and performance studies since they began. In line with shifts toward interdisciplinary sciences and transdisciplinary practices, PaR represents a break from the false choice between theoretical and archival methods. It resists binary formulations (practice vs. research) and two-way traffic (‘at the crossroads’). Instead, it embraces a new conception of epistemology, which I will define as *entanglement*.

Entanglement can be interpreted as both metaphor *and* method in that it represents the knotted complexity of the routes (and ‘roots’) towards knowledge, while also being available as a research strategy. To *entangle* is to twist together, to complicate or simply to become tangled. A tangle, from the Middle English or Scandinavian, is ‘a confused mass of intertwined threads’ or ‘a confused and complicated state’ (OED, 1998: 1423). However, I offer the method-metaphor of *entanglement* in the specific and local example of my own PaR, rather than as a global metaphor for methodology itself. I am aware that I *entangled* my original practice, by documenting, discussing and disseminating it *as research*. That process created a ‘confused mass of intertwined threads’ that eventually led to a thesis about creative practice in performance. These knots have taken three years to tie and three more years to loosen. The ‘roots’ of practice and the ‘branches’ of research have therefore grown as one, through an entangled rhizomatic system.

Of course, *entanglement* has a scholarly tradition of its own, and here I emphasize Gregory Bateson’s understanding of ‘the mind as an ecological “tangle”’ (1972). As Florence Chiew writes: ‘the word “tangle” is taken from the works of mathematicians Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, as well as semanticist Alfred Korzybski.

In particular, Russell's theory of logical types, or the paradox of self-reference, caught Bateson's attention' (2012: 47). There is not space here to explore 'entanglement' across the disciplines but, importantly, it may constitute an emerging transdisciplinary field.⁶ For example, Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007) explains that: 'To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence' (iv). This thinking recalls Bateson's work on mind and nature:

Epistemology is always and inevitably personal. The point of the probe is always in the heart of the explorer: What is my answer to the question of the nature of knowing? I surrender to the belief that my knowing is a small part of a wider integrated knowing that knits the entire biosphere or creation. (2002: 82)

Chiew notes that this is 'an expanded notion of temporality and spatial awareness' in which the individual: 'is not simply bounded and located as a separate being from other beings. She *is* a general system of entangled relationality' (2012: 48). For the PaR scholar, practice becomes a series of interrelated tangles, experienced as a network or web.

I will extend this model of the PaR methodology by briefly considering the IFTR Performance-as-Research working group, which has nurtured aspects of this thesis at five separate meetings (2009–14). Mark Fleishman, a former convenor of this group, emphasizes the '*difference* of PaR' as: 'a series of embodied repetitions in time, on both micro (bodies, movements, sounds, improvisations, moments) and macro (events, productions, projects, installations) levels' (2012: 30). Fleishman's two scales highlight the importance of using media and materials that can document micro- and macro-PaR. While this approach recalls the 'multiple directions' of PaR that alarmed Whitton, it also

⁶ Recent examples include Chris Salter's *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance* (2010) and Ian Hodder's *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (2012).

supports Kershaw and Piccini's earlier emphasis on documentation. If we disentangle practical experiments, then digital (or analogue) documentation is crucial to achieving a method for explicating research. The IFTR working group devised a 'participatory laboratory'⁷ as a form that could contain the complexity of diverse PaR presentations. This initiative drew upon the experimental histories and theatre laboratories discussed in this thesis, as a basis for re-iteration of the participants' research through reflexive practice. The approach can involve workshops, installations, performances and interventions, with each being carefully framed analytically and documented by the group. The point of this participatory laboratory is not only to disseminate research, but also to *entangle* one's work with that of others. In this (sometimes difficult) process, ideas are challenged and practice is critiqued, while new nodes in one's epistemological network may be fused. To extend my method-metaphor, the knot is untied but then knotted again. On its own history, the group has reported that: 'Jacqueline Martin (2002) and Baz Kershaw (2005) identified the need for a working group dealing with PaR given the increasing interest within the discipline in combining practice and research inquiry.' (Barton et al., 2013: 1). Meeting for the first time in Helsinki (2006), this group has since evolved an intercultural model of scholarship that evokes collaborative performances:⁸

So while other projects and processes like PARIP and the Artistic Research debate in Europe (led by Henk Borgdorff and others) have provided in-depth thinking on the subject, the discussion at the various meetings of this working group have occurred amongst a much wider range of international participants from a diversity of contexts, and in this sense the ramifications and resonances have extended well beyond Europe. The inclusion of African, Asian, Australasian and Latin American voices articulating different experiences in the discussions have challenged and enriched the mainstream Euro-American discourse on PaR. (2013: 1)

⁷ Devised by Baz Kershaw (with Anna Birch and Mark Fleishman) in 2009.

⁸ 'For the purposes of the Group, "performance" is understood to include a range of media, from theatre through dance to film/video/television, and interlocking research interests, from aesthetic through thematic to contextual' (Barton et al., 2013: 1).

This description provides clear sources for *entangled* practices and the ‘laboratory’ functions as a venue for *dis-entanglement* and *re-entanglement*. As I have discussed elsewhere (e.g. Heron, 2015), PaR can be understood as a process of ‘dislocation’ (Kershaw, 2011) and ‘ontogenesis’ (Fleishman, 2012), but each of these method-metaphors generates new complexity in the realm of practice. As noted above, it is largely through the documentation of practice and its discursive analysis *as* research wherein original knowledge can emerge. For example, in Chapter 1, I initiate a theatre laboratory on Beckett’s drama (informed by archival materials); I then re-iterate this practice in the creation of new Beckettian performance, before using digital documentation of this practice as part of a scholarly writing process. I aim to demonstrate this procedure in each chapter, over three iterations of research through practice, and to conclude with a revised understanding of experimental theatre as transdisciplinary performance. I am particularly interested in how such experimental procedures can be shared with a wider public and with disciplines beyond the theatre. I conclude this Introduction with a brief reflection upon that cycle, by returning to Borgdorff’s *The Conflict of the Faculties* (2012).

So, I will argue that the PaR practitioner-scholar is always already *entangled*. Thus Borgdorff, discussing the indeterminacy of experimental processes – where we don’t yet know what we don’t yet know – draws upon the writings of Hans-Jorg Rheinberger (2006) to consider ‘artworks as epistemic things’ (193).

To paraphrase Rheinberger, as long as artworks and their concepts remain vague, they generate a productive tension: in reaching out for the unknown, they become tools of research. In the context of artistic research, artworks are the generators of that which we do not yet know. They thereby invite us to think. Artistic research is the articulation of this unfinished thinking.

(Borgdorff, 2012: 194)

I return to this statement repeatedly throughout the thesis, and ultimately reflect upon an ontology that Borgdorff calls ‘*a productive not-yet-knowing*’ (194); but I would emphasize here the significance of this ‘unfinished thinking’ to my own methods. I drew upon both PaR networks and ‘artistic research’ publications to inform specific methods of my own, using documentation to access the ‘unfinished thinking’ of performance practice.

Alongside this process I have searched for the ‘unfinished thinking’ in theatre history through its material archive and critical traditions. Borgdorff’s notion of ‘art as research – creates room for what is unthought and unexpected’ (196) and my own PaR have functioned in the same way. Therefore, I no longer locate its methodology at a crossroads; rather it inhabits a dense tissue of entanglements between performance cultures and research methods. Regarding my own thought processes, which have been more ecological than technological, and therefore broadly ‘posthumanist’ (cf. Hassan, 1977), I consider *entanglement* a useful metaphor for the reader of this thesis. The ensuing ‘tangle’ of practice and research – as well as historiography and theatre making – is both deliberately designed and circumstantial, yet my aim throughout is to disentangle epistemology from experience.

Chapter 1

If you could see your way to re-humanising the text a little...

(Tynan, 1964: 293)

I. *Organic machines: on ‘re-humanising’ Beckett*

This chapter will address occasions when theatrical rehearsal breaks down, allowing the *organic/mechanical* problem to emerge through experimental performance. I will explore particular moments of breakdown in relation to Samuel Beckett’s drama. Beckett’s theatre will be considered as a *mechanical* practice, something that Tynan wanted ‘re-humanising’ (1994: 293). In his riposte to Tynan, Devine described rehearsal as ‘an *organic* process’ (1964). As explained in my Introduction, the *organic/mechanical* problem has its origins within the modernist period, especially through biomechanics and neurology. In the four sections (I-IV) of this chapter, I first extend this analysis to 1960s British theatre practice then give a detailed example using *Play* (1964), followed by PaR materials relating to *Discords* (2010). The Section IV focuses on multidisciplinary perspectives for investigation on the *organic/mechanical* problem. Ultimately, I will discuss Beckett’s plays in performance as producing an experimental mode of human embodiment, specifically as ‘theatre machines’ (Brook, 1990: 65).

As I have established in the Introduction, Brook does not direct Beckett’s drama until the 1990s, after which he writes in *Threads of Time* (1998) that ‘the search for a charge[d] simplicity and economy... [is] a “distillation” (1998: 224)’. I will argue later that ‘the Beckettian’ in performance practice is a paradoxical synthesis of the *mechanical* (machine-like instrumentation) and the *organic* (corporeal embodiment) which is best understood in terms of distillation, e.g. paring down, emptying out, taking away, stripping bare, reducing down, not-acting. These methods were developed by Devine and Beckett during their 1964 rehearsal process and directly influenced my PaR process for *Discords*.

As I will show below, the London reviewers of *Play* and critical writing of the period frequently describe Beckettian production as a theatre of machines. In describing Beckett's plays as 'theatre machines', Brook positions them alongside the theatres of Artaud and Grotowski, as examples of Holy Theatre: 'pure inventions, fresh images sharply defined – and they stand on the stage as objects' (Brook 1990: 65). Brook insists that these 'objects' refuse to *mean something* but only coming into being during performance, where they remain 'critic proof' (65). In positioning Beckett's work in this way, Brook was partially recalling his own theatre-going in the late 1940s: 'a theatre of colour and movement, of fine fabrics, of shadows, of eccentric, cascading words, of leaps of thought and of cunning machines, of lightness and of all forms of mystery and surprise' (48). While Brook has a tendency to over-simplify Beckett's writing in this essay, he more accurately positions it in a European tradition of performance traceable to the Parisian symbolists and, inspired by Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1965), to the early modern period. However, it is important to emphasize that Brook is interpreting the theatre of the 1960s as part of a wider network of contemporary performance, uncomplicated by political or temporal distinctions and taking place in new experimental forms, from Beckettian 'machines' to Artaudian 'happenings'.

Brook is particularly interested in *Happy Days* (1962), the first Beckett play he directed (in 1995), and this informs most of his writing on Beckett. In *The Empty Space* (1990 [1968]) he discusses *Happy Days* as an example of the 'poetry, nobility, beauty and magic' (66) that Beckett is bringing back to the theatre. Brook then describes how the play in performance works upon the audience in the same ways as it treats its protagonist. Brook sees a direct connection between Winnie buried in the sand and an audience member who 'invents and prints every form of imaginary complaint as a mechanism to ward off the uncomfortable truth' (66). Elsewhere, Brook writes of *Happy Days* as an exemplification of 'Beckett at his finest [where he] seems to have the power of

casting a stage picture, a stage relationship, a stage machine from his most intense experience that in a flash, inspires, exists, stands there complete in itself, not telling, not dictating, symbolic without symbolism' (Brook 1987: 31). Brook admires the objectification of subjectivity in Beckett's drama and the creation of the 'stage object' as a total mechanization of the theatrical event. What seems absent from Brook's engagement with Beckett is the 'organic process' that Devine emphasized when directing *Play*.

Written within two years of each other, *Happy Days* and *Play*, are both 'face plays' (see Pilling, 2006) in which the human body is dehumanized and disembodied in order to emphasize the corporeality of the head. Whether buried up to the neck in sand or clamped at the neck in an urn, the performer in the second act of *Happy Days* and the only act of *Play* will experience stillness and stasis. In both cases, Beckett then restricts the expressivity of the face, eyes and mouth – 'voices toneless and faces impassive throughout' in *Play* – and in *Happy Days* he controls movement even more: '*Her head, which she can no longer turn, nor bow, nor raise, faces front motionless throughout act. Movements of eyes as indicated.*' (Beckett, 1986: 160). In *Play*, there is the additional requirement to have three heads produce toneless voices and impassive faces throughout, which we explored in our PaR experiments. As I aim to show below, an initial theatre laboratory process created an original piece of devised performance, with an ensemble that was trained in Beckettian approaches to the body and bodily restriction over a series of months. Corporeal abstractions (disembodied heads, mouths or voices) were regularly employed in direct reference to Beckett's *Happy Days* and *Play*, but also to *Not I* (1972) and *That Time* (1975). We identified physical restrictions for performers (e.g. heads fixed in scenographic structures, the use of recorded and strict vocal refrains) and then re-produced these forms within a 'theatre machine'. The ensemble found that this 'machine' could be created physically, but that a theatrical set better replicated Beckettian restriction (like dustbins and urns). We therefore constructed a set that would 'fix' the performers in a

cabinet, with vents that opened to reveal their heads. The opening of these vents in the cabinet would simulate the same interrogative atmosphere as the light in *Play*. While the characters seemed initially unaware of the mechanism they were trapped within, the ensemble and the audience reported that the ‘machine’ presented an overall narrative for each head that would emerge and re-emerge at pace during the piece.

I would like to recall Anna McMullan’s recent work on Beckett’s late theatre, where the body ‘is presented as both sign and site, engine or matrix of production (of stories, semblances, voice, footfalls or hiccups) and fabric to be composed and recomposed with limited materials’ (2010: 125), we can view the co-existence of *mechanical* and *organic* forms of embodiment with Beckettian performances. She continues, the body is ‘itself a matrix of embodiments . . . a site of production, Murphy’s “matrix of surds”’ (126). This organic distribution of embodiment over a series of mechanized performance events has been articulated by many of Beckett’s later collaborators in a variety of ways. For example, what McMullan characterizes as ‘the extraordinary physical and vocal discipline needed for such an approach’ has been expressed as ‘double vision’ by Frank Neumann or ‘spiraling inward’ by Billie Whitelaw (128). Phillip Zarrilli’s notion of ‘bodymind’ (cf. 2001: 2) evokes Pierre Chabert’s extended work on Beckett and practice, where: ‘The body becomes the sensitive receptacle upon which the voice engraves itself, a kind of human tape recorder.’ (1982: 28). In most oral histories on practicing Beckett, performers habitually use vocabulary that evokes the *organic* and the *mechanical*, which I would relate to the physical intensity of the work. From this perspective, Brook may have captured something very significant in his description of the plays as ‘theatre machines’ and, as already noted, this is a defining feature of the 1964 reviews of *Play*. This apparent contradiction in Beckettian performance – it is both compassionate *and* dehumanizing – led to a wealth of critical complaint. Consider, for example, this early review of the Old Vic production:

Dark stage. From the shadows gleam three urns with a head visible above each rim. Potted scare-crows [*sic*]. Or turnips. Or coconuts to shy at. Whatever the contents, they have rotted. Pause. The mouths open not to speak, hardly to enunciate, but to bleep like electronic machines.

(RNT/PR/4/1/4)

This description provides a comical yet complex way of framing the condition of embodiment experienced by Rosemary Harris, Robert Stephens and Billie Whitelaw at the Old Vic. Turnips in pots, rotting contents, bleeping machines; these are bizarre images of Beckett's 'theatre machines'. Audience responses to *Fail Better*'s 'machines' are equally surreal; for example, 'lovely cogs of man-machine' and 'reminds me of Beckett' (Warwick, 2012). The following detailed analysis of the 1964 production aims to articulate a much fuller account of the *organic/mechanical* problem.

II. 'What do you take me for, a something machine?'⁹

This section will consider archival materials relating to Devine's staging of *Play* in 1964 in order to consider Beckett's presence in the rehearsal process, and the controversy this prompted at the National Theatre. Following a brief exposition of the collaboration between Beckett and Devine, it will focus on Beckett's attempts to mechanise the performers. This involved the rapid delivery of text and toneless acting voices. The style was fully supported by Devine, which prompted an urgent request from Tynan: 'If you could see your way to *re-humanising* the text a little, I'll bet that the actors and the audience will thank you – even if Beckett doesn't!' (Tynan, 1994: 293). Laurence Olivier (then Artistic Director of the National Theatre) described this event as 'a

⁹ W2 in *Play*: 'Anything between us, he said, what do you take me for, a something machine? And of course with him no danger of ... the spiritual thing' (Beckett, 1964:12).

detonation with an alarming sound-off' (294) in a memo to Tynan where he also noted an extreme lack of tact from his literary manager.

Since the late 1950s, Devine had emerged as one of the playwright's trusted collaborators and 'believed Beckett was the best guide to staging the plays' (Wardle, 1978: 207). As a result of Roger Blin struggling to fund the first staging of *Fin de Partie*, 'the E.S.C. set about acquiring this production to open the 1957 season and dispatched Devine to negotiate the world premiere' with Beckett (1978: 204). Devine documented this first meeting – 'half an hour with him in his flat in Paris' – in almost religious terms: 'I felt I was in touch with all the great streams of European thought and literature from Dante onwards. The man seemed to have lived and suffered so that I could see' (204). In Beckett, Devine had discovered 'another master as austere as Michael Saint-Denis' (204) and found another mentor in the process. The French language world premiere of *Fin de Partie* opened at the Royal Court as planned in 1957, soon followed by the English language version (with Devine himself as Hamm), for which 'Beckett supervised the last two week's rehearsals' (206). This second production established Devine's faith in the author's creation, and as a performer 'he was exceptionally nervous of his responsibilities towards it' (206).

Play had started life for Beckett as 'a face play' in 1961, when he wrote to Herbert Myron 'that *How It Is* is still awaiting revision, but that he has had an idea for a new act, one hour, three faces (mouths) and *lights*' (Pilling, 2006: 159). He was invited to the world premiere rehearsals in Germany in the summer of 1963, the year of the play's publication. This practical engagement with the theatre was important for the textual process as evidenced by the fact that Beckett 'tells Barney Rosset that he can't establish the definitive text for *Play* without a certain number of rehearsals' (160). Beckett had already spent time in rehearsal with Devine, under equally difficult circumstances.

In 1962 Beckett had travelled to London to help Devine on the Royal Court production of *Happy Days*, which included a last minute casting change resulting in Brenda Bruce playing Winnie. Beckett wrote to his friend Avigdor Arikha that: 'It didn't start any too well – voice and inflections wrong. But it's already much better... She catches on very quickly and works very hard. Devine is very kind and there's an excellent working atmosphere' (Knowlson, 1996: 500). However, as Knowlson explains:

A fortnight after his arrival, he wrote to friends that the production was heading for disaster and that he could do nothing to remedy the situation. In fact, the modest, insecure Brenda Bruce needed praise and encouragement, not criticism. And she was so shaken by Beckett's reactions and by her inability to get it right in his terms, that she finally broke down in floods of tears. (501)

Seeking a mechanically perfect rhythm from the actress, and prepared to go to any lengths to achieve it, his introduction of a metronome to rehearsal exemplified a paradoxical rift between 'discipline and sensitivity' (McCarthy in Oppenheim and Buning, 1996: 150) in a Beckett rehearsal; it also indicated the insensitive and unsustainable methods he practiced at this time. A performer breaking down under the pressure of over-mechanized practice, something Whitelaw would later experience in 1973, represents a 'stochastic' moment in the process, where failure creates a feedback loop within the system of production (see Bateson, 1972: 266–7; McKenzie, 2001: 71). Within this context, the author in rehearsal was limiting the actor's learning process, so Brenda Bruce could only proceed without Beckett in rehearsal. As Knowlson documents:

Beckett went away into the country with George Devine and Jocelyn Herbert and her children. On a walk with Sam and the children, Jocelyn suggested to him, gently but firmly, that Brenda Bruce couldn't cope with the pressure he was putting on her. (1996: 501)

Herbert's intervention recognized the delicate balance of what Devine would later call 'the organic process' of rehearsal in contrast to the mechanical pressures of production. In 1962 Beckett was still serving his apprenticeship in theatrical production (he would not direct his plays alone until 1966–7 by which time he had observed both Blin and Devine on several occasions). However, Beckett stated simply 'I've been kicked out of rehearsals' and, according to Knowlson, 'the damage had already been done' (502). In Wardle's account, 'Devine had stopped directing and virtually handed the show over to the author. Jocelyn Herbert saw a disastrous run-through and gently suggested that Miss Bruce needed some time to herself' (1978: 207).

There is an important parallel to be drawn between Bruce's experiences in 1962 and Devine's own nervousness during rehearsals for his 1957 *Endgame*. Conditioning bodies for the intense disciplinary rigor of performance, Beckett was not only providing the necessary material circumstances for production, but also discounting the special emotional needs of the actors and, as Tynan would later suggest (1994: 263), the audience's experience too. In this period, before Beckett found the confidence to direct production processes in his own right, his presence in rehearsal was somewhere between an avant-garde autocrat and, at least for Bruce's co-star Peter Dugaid, 'a meddling amateur' (Wardle, 1978: 207). Beckett's next collaboration with Devine crystallized these problems, when the newly formed National Theatre brought author-director collaborations from the Royal Court to the Old Vic. Devine would direct Beckett's *Play* in a double-bill with William Gaskill's production of Seneca's *Philoctetes* (adapted by Keith Johnstone). The Beckett-half of this double bill caused huge controversy in rehearsal.

The 1964 'show reports' in the NT archive record the timing of the performance as between seventeen and nineteen minutes in length. During this each performer has to repeat every line across the two main sections in response to the stage direction: 'Repeat play' (Beckett, 1964: 22). Commonly known as the 'da capo' ending, this required a

musical and mechanical discipline from the three actors (Harris, Stephens and Whitelaw), who were ‘toneless and impassive’ throughout. Furthermore, during the repetition, they were required to be so fast with the lines, that they were audibly gasping for breath (BL, *Play* 1964: NP739W). In a letter to Devine, Beckett reported his experience of the rehearsal process in Paris:

The whole idea involves a spot mechanism of greater flexibility than has seemed necessary so far. The inquirer (light) begins to emerge as no less a victim of his inquiry than they and as needing to be free, within narrow limits, literally to act the part, i.e. to vary if only slightly his speeds and intensities. [Note: Perhaps some sort of manual control after all.] (RNT/PR/4/1/4)

Indeed, Beckett had started to explicitly consider the technical elements of performance during this period and many of the reviews mention the operator, Tony Ferris, by name. Harris, Stephens and Whitelaw, were consequently working with a fourth performer, the human being at the other end of a tight spot light. This aspect of production introduces an additional mechanism to the process and the image of the spotlight-operator may provide a useful analogy when thinking through the *organic/mechanical* problem.

Almost all of the reviews of the production allude to the mechanical nature of the performance style: the performers ‘bleep like electronic machines ... like well-regulated mechanisms’ (RNT/PR/4/1/4); in an piece entitled ‘Stamping on Mr Beckett’s verbal treadmill’ the reviewer describes the ‘uninflected monotone’ and a performance which is ‘motionless, impersonal and sterile’; in another with the headline ‘The three faces of Beckett’s contempt’, the play is ‘short, weird and compulsive’ with ‘swift, staccato sentences’ as well as ‘purposeful monotony and repetition, with the ritualistic insistence of a litany’; Bamber Gascoigne writes ‘the rhythmic staccato effect is like a litany recorded at 33 and played back at 45, or one of those relentless machines at country stations which click out morse codes – whichever is more irritating’; and Peter

Lewis of the *Daily Mail* uses his description ‘they speak mechanically, like speeded-up tape recorders, as they recite the course of their eternal triangle’, to justify his conclusion: ‘as an experiment, justified. But I see no hope that it leads anywhere’ (RNT/PR/4/1/4).

Only a fortnight before opening, Tynan sent his infamous letter to Devine, demanding the immediate ‘re-humanisation’ of the piece: ‘I trust the play completely, and I trust your production of it. What I don’t especially trust is Beckett as co-director’ (Tynan, 1994: 293). He takes particular pains to emphasize the unprofessionalism of the playwright: ‘as we know, Beckett has never sat through any of his plays in the presence of an audience: but *we* have to live with that audience night after night!’ He reveals the institutional risks associated with this production:

Play is the second new play the National Theatre has done... our first experimental work... it may jeopardise our future plans for experiment and put a weapon into the hands of those people... who think the NT should stick to the popular classics and not cater for minority tastes. (Tynan, 1994: 293)

Ironically, Tynan wanted to produce the show in such a way that it would reflect well upon the newly established NT, and especially its bearing upon the future funding of new writing. However, as representatives of the Royal Court, directors Devine and Gaskill fiercely supported writers’ wishes and felt Tynan profoundly misunderstood the significance of this. Reflecting on this period, Gaskill writes:

George ... came under pressure from Tynan, who understood nothing of responsibility to a writer, to play the piece at a more normal speed than the breakneck pace demanded by Beckett. George would have nothing of it. I think he felt we were starting to sell out. Perhaps he was right. (1988: 59)

Devine did certainly not sell out on this occasion. In fact, an audio recording (BL, *Play* 1964: NP739W) of this production reveals an extraordinarily fast paced delivery and monotonous mechanised speech from all three characters, sounding somewhere between a machine-gun and a linguistic-drill. The presence of laughter throughout the recording demonstrates not only that the fast pace was intelligible to an audience, but also that there was no need to ‘re-humanise’ the play. Indeed, Beckett’s ‘something machine’ was made all too human by the audience laughter, and arguably this was only achieved because of the highly surreal and restrictive performance style. Even so, the theatrical mechanism produced an organic response and the audience brought their own compassion and humour to Beckett’s theatrical experiment. Just as the reader completes prose with her own imagination, so the audience member completes the drama with her own embodied reactions. As Devine wrote in his programme note: ‘we have to surrender to the experience which the poet has prepared for us in order to enjoy ourselves or to criticize it’ (RNT/PP/1/1/26). From these events – and in particular, the audience laughter – it is possible to state that the piece was ‘re-humanised’ *in performance*.

Furthermore, Devine had responded to Tynan: ‘I’m afraid you’ll have to have a bit more guts if you really want to do experimental works, which, nine times out of ten, only come off for a “minority” to begin with’ (Devine in Wardle, 1978: 208). This exchange concluded with a memo from Olivier who warned Tynan that sometimes: ‘you can be too fucking tactless for words’ (Tynan, 1994: 294).

III. **‘What do you take me for, a *research* machine?’**

This section deals with my own PaR experiments for *Discords*, which incorporated Beckettian aesthetics of production into a contemporary devising process. These experiments will reveal *plasticity* in performance, by revealing instances of ‘flow experience’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) in stark contrast with physical restriction (of

material objects and the actors' bodies). This tension between the organic flow of the performer's process and the restrictive machinery of production can be understood as *plastic* (malleable, adaptable, formative). For Pierre Chabert:

In Beckett's theatre the body undergoes metamorphoses. It is worked, violated even, much like the raw materials of the painter or the sculptor, in the service of a systematic exploration of all possible relationships between the body and movement, the body and space, the body and objects, the body and light and the body and words. (1982: 23)

The *plasticity* of the Beckettian body is something I will return to in the next section, regarding 'brain plasticity' where 'the machine learns, differentiates itself, reconstructs itself' (Malabou, 2008: xii). However, for the purpose of the PaR experiments in this section, I would like to emphasize that the *plasticity* of practice itself (where bodies can be formed and reformed through repeated experiments under the same material conditions). The *organic/mechanical* problem will therefore emerge as an observable phenomenon through methods including, but not limited to: suppression of naturalistic detail, removal of superfluous detail, extreme physical restriction, and flexible scales of intensity. These formal qualities will be accentuated by repetitive action (e.g. durational games) and practical variation (e.g. extended pauses). The organic process of the actor will be contrasted with the mechanical aspects of rehearsal to produce new devised material from Beckettian dramaturgy. In the examples that follow, I re-value failure in performance, so that the 'flow experience' of the participants could be heightened without the immediate pressure of public performance. There will be an important distinction between the three phases of this project, from the initial experiments, *BeckettLab* (2009), to the devising process, *Discords* (2010) and the revived production, *Discords* (2011).

In planning this process, I was keen to conduct ‘practical’ research on Beckett at a time when his work has been subjected to a particularly ‘archival’ turn in Beckett Studies (see Heron and Johnson, 2014). My hunch had been that historical controversies (e.g. Devine’s *Play*, JoAnne Akalaitis’ 1984 *Endgame*, or Deborah Warner’s 1993 *Footfalls*) could be better understood through practical engagement with the source texts and rehearsal methods. In doing so, I was working with the idea of ‘Beckett’s DNA’ informed by Josette Feral’s notion of ‘performance genetics’ (2008: 223) and drawing upon contemporary theatre practice, such as Complicite’s 2009 *Endgame*, directed by Simon McBurney, who stated the following:

I was insistent that everybody should feel the rhythm that Beckett creates on the page as a starting point, and not decide what we should do until that was really within our bodies. From that sensation within your body you can begin to let go and allow your own imagination to travel and somebody begins to arrive and then as that person arrives as an actor, as a character, so gradually you unfold and almost like a plant from the seed, the seed being the words and the rhythms and the accuracy of what I would call ‘Beckett’s DNA’, from that can grow a character, which is almost like a plant. But it comes slowly. If you apply somebody too quickly to the material, it all starts to disintegrate. You have to go from the very very inside and then something happens. (McBurney in Campbell, 2010)

So our research question was: can you isolate ‘Beckett’s DNA’ in a theatre laboratory (as part of a process of generating performance material)?

i. Exploring ‘theatre machines’ (Phase 1)

Our *BeckettLab* process was characterized by weekly four-hour workshops at the CAPITAL Centre, University of Warwick, with Fail Better’s Student Ensemble. Tasks involved vocal warm-ups, textual work on Beckett’s plays, devising exercises based on

the plays, and movement work focusing on restriction. These activities were documented through notation, video and photography (see *Figures 1.1 & 1.2*).



Figures 1.1 & 1.2: BeckettLab (2009)

We set about isolating ‘Beckett’s DNA’ from the play-texts (*Play*, *Not I*, and prose), extracting ‘genetic’ material for devising and pushing beyond false starts, mistakes and errors. The ‘DNA’ emerged through devised fragments that featured stream-of-consciousness spoken text, physical restrictions involving stasis, or corporeal abstractions. We judged some of these experiments as too restrictive to make their way into production, however other experiments produced results that did not evoke the highly regulated style of ‘Beckettian’ performance. We returned to Brook’s notion of Beckett’s plays as: ‘pure inventions, fresh images sharply defined – they stand on the stage as objects... *theatre machines*’ (Brook, 1990: 65). This concept was something that we could explore tangibly and through practical movement tasks. We devised a series of

durational games (10-15mins in length) that could re-produce the physical restrictions of late Beckett plays such as *Quad* (1982) or *What Where* (1983). These exercises often led to failure or exhaustion, but they were perhaps the most productive in terms of creating the bodily *affects* of ‘doing Beckett’ (see *Figure 1.3*).



Figure 1.3: BeckettLab (2009)

In this example, four performers devised rules for movement around a central point that required them to reshuffle their own bodies in a particular order. Each new movement produced rules for each subsequent movement and the ensemble had to solve the puzzle of unlocking their bodies through repeated action. *Figure 1.3* shows the performers towards the end of their game, which failed to produce the expected outcome. In fact, the ensemble became locked in a durational system of movement, where the only escape would be through re-iteration. In the event, they collapsed in an exhausted heap and ended the game as the rules had defeated them. Such movement tasks recall Beckett’s earlier pieces such as *Act Without Words I&II* (1956), or unfinished fragments such as *J.M. Mime*, evoked in McMullan’s description of a ‘continual reworking of the vulnerable body

caught in a system beyond the control of the conscious' (2010: 66). For Fail Better, 'Beckett's DNA' became shorthand for a performance technique produced from these material conditions. We became especially interested in the strict mechanisms that enacted repetitive movement, which McMullan describes as 'a laboratory where Beckett explored the dramatic and compositional possibilities of the performer's body' (66).

Our experimental process explored these conditions of Beckettian embodiment *as* a laboratory, though workshops that promoted self-reflexivity and meta-theatricality. I use these terms here to suggest that our practice produced a feedback loop *for* performance, *from* performance. This produced a special awareness for the ensemble that isolated 'Beckett's DNA' as raw material for devising new work. As part of the workshops, I would first focus on practical devising tasks for the ensemble, and then interweave materials from performance archives. This process allowed us to explore theatre history experimentally, internationally and inter-culturally. In 'Lucky's Energy', Jane Goodall emphasizes that Beckett's plays 'demand this level of discipline and intensity... paradox must enter the actor's bones' (2006: 195). Likewise, McMullan notes the 'the extraordinary physical and vocal discipline needed for such an approach', recalling Whitelaw's description of 'spiraling inward' and Chabert's focus upon 'bodily posture' (2010: 128). During the *BeckettLab* workshops, we developed exercises that specifically used restriction and removal (through repeated physical action) to expose a comparable state of static self-reflexivity.

ii. Devising 'organic machinery' (Phase 2)

We chose to conclude the *BeckettLab* process in order to begin a devising process for *Discords*, and this break in the overall process became highly significant. It enabled a smaller group of performers to transform our findings into new material for performance. We were particularly keen to maintain the disciplined focus on physical

restriction and repetitive action. Our intention to extract ‘Beckett’s DNA’ and create a new ‘theatre machine’ was a stated aim and we searched for text that could be used as raw material. We found this in Shakespearean verse, but other textual sources were considered and have been sampled in subsequent practice at Warwick (i.e. Gogol, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Darwin, Woolf, Spicer, Kane). So our new work recycled the Beckettian dramaturgy and added raw materials from Shakespearean tragedy. Working in the Shakespearean context of the CAPITAL Centre, we decided to recreate scenes from *King Lear* and *Macbeth* as if they were plays by Beckett. This produced the vocal rhythms and physical restrictions that we needed for devising, and created a mood of meta-theatricality. This was re-enforced by the choice of textual fragments, for example: ‘This is not Lear’ (see *Discords* script on CD-Rom). The first *Discords* performances moved through nine iterations during fifteen minutes, and this was repeated every half hour for three separate audiences over a one-and-a-half hour intensive period.

We isolated the performer’s heads, as if they were emerging from a cabinet of curiosities (or an archive of disembodied heads), inspired by the Nietzschean ‘discord’:

When creatures like us appeared, which had bodies and conscious minds, they were, as Nietzsche called them, “hybrids of plants and ghosts”, the combination of a bounded, well-circumscribed, easily identifiable living object with seemingly unbounded, internal, and difficult-to-localize mental animation. He also called those creatures “discords”, for they did possess a strange marriage of the clearly material with the apparently insubstantial (Damasio 1999: 143).¹⁰

This quotation from Antonio Damasio’s *The Feeling of What Happens* (1999) recalls our practical work on theatrical ‘machines’, in which we re-created ‘organisms’ through repetitive movement and physical restriction. By isolating ‘Beckett’s DNA’, and using it

¹⁰ F. Nietzsche, in the prologue to *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Some translations refer to “phantom” for “ghost”, and “disharmony” for “discord”. (Damasio 1999: 37 fn.5)

to devise performance, we developed a conception of the body as ‘discord’ (after Nietzsche). The ‘discord’ became a vessel for ‘Beckett DNA’ in our imagination, and its hybridity as biological certainty *and* a ghosted entity (a *phyto-phantom*, if you will) appeared to give form to our creative work. We also admired the way in which these ‘discords’ could appear through a vent (in the set) as if from nowhere.

Prior to taking their place on set, the ensemble performed several intensively physical warm-ups (shown as blurred figures in front of the set in *Figure 1.4*) in order to generate enough energy to ‘fuel’ to the ‘theatre machine’. From our *BeckettLab* experiments, we knew that the actor’s body could be restricted only in relationship to stage materials or scenographic structures that contain its movement (e.g. the dustbins in *Endgame*, the urns in *Play*, the rocking chair in *Rockaby*, etc.). This encouraged us to collaborate closely with the designer (Nomi Everall) in order to produce a Beckettian ‘landscape’ for performance. This could be treated as a mechanism from which the ‘discords’ could emerge like plants on a wall or ghosts in a machine (see *Figure 1.5*).



Figure 1.4: Discords (2010)



Figure 1.5: *Discords* (2010)

Comparing *Figures 1.4 & 1.5* is useful in demonstrating both the restriction of the material structure and head-sized vents through which the performers focused their energy. I use the word ‘vent’ to describe these openings as it conveys both ‘aperture’ (through which light can pass) and ‘outlet’ (for the expulsion of waste).¹¹ This unique synthesis of physical restriction and corporeal abstraction produced an experimental ‘splicing’ of Beckett’s ‘DNA’ with Shakespearean ‘proteins’ in performance (see *Discords* video on CD-Rom). Although I am playfully using the language of biological science here, I will consider the *theatrical/scientific* problem seriously in the next chapter. That chapter will show that interdisciplinary outcomes are possible through performance. For now, I would like to return to the elements that re-produced the *organic/mechanical* problem in *Discords*.

¹¹ Beckett’s phrase ‘the head and its anus the mouth’ from *Texts for Nothing* 10 (1999: 50) is appropriate here.

For one audience member (Warwick, 2010), Beckettian echoes were felt *in* performance, even though no specific Beckett play was being staged. This capacity to experience Beckettian *affects* in the theatre, via the re-embodiment of his dramaturgical restrictions, becomes a practical way of responding to the controversies of theatrical production (where radical interpretations have been censored). I would suggest that my approach constitutes a covert mode of experimentalism within ‘Beckett Studies’. This strategy is part of a wider interdisciplinary approach that draws upon the research of Nixon and Van Hulle (*BDMP*, 2011–), McMullan *et al* (*Staging Beckett*, 2012–15) and my own collaborations with Nicholas Johnson (*Beckett Laboratory*, 2013–). This work is enriched by Johnson’s idea of: ‘a performative Beckett who is not a deceased artist, but a living idea that goes on, incessantly to be accessed and apprehended by audiences, students, scholars and the general public’ (2012: 39).

In the same way that Beckett was ‘kicked out’ (Knowlson, 1996: 502) of the 1964 rehearsal, we chose to kick him out of our rehearsals in 2010. By this I mean that his work was ‘genetically’ present but textually absent, it had provided a ‘genomic’ structure for our work, a score for performance that made use of restriction to produce a devising method. From Beckett we had drawn the disembodied heads, the textual rhythms and numerical scales, and this led to the devised piece *Discords*. The decision to use early modern text, from *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, as our dialogue had been informed by Brook’s 1962 *King Lear* at the Royal Shakespeare Company (under the influence of Jan Kott). The 1970 film version, also directed by Brook, creates a Beckettian atmosphere for Shakespeare aided by the casting of Patrick Magee (as Cornwall) and Jack MacGowran (as the Fool). I made constant reference to this during the PaR experiments, as an example of ‘Beckett’s DNA’ in performance.

iii. Reviving a ‘mechanical organism’ (Phase 3)

The opportunity to revive *Discords* at the Warwick Arts Centre (WAC) brought a new set of experimental procedures in 2011. This allowed us to test if the Laban ‘efforts’ system (discussed in Chapter 3) could be used to standardize the movement and mechanize the speech of the ensemble. This protracted experiment scored all transitions within the piece (using Laban ‘efforts’ such as moving from a ‘Press’ to a ‘Punch’). The experiments were informed by my own research on notation practice in Beckett and Laban as well as Goodall’s pithy observation that ‘as a director, Beckett evidently had notations of his own reflecting a spatial and temporal exactness that would have made Laban blanch...’ (2008: 117). As explored below, we returned to *Discords* as a music score or choreographic sequence that we scored as tightly as possible in order to heighten the subsequent release in performance. Moving this small experimental piece from a private studio (CAPITAL) to a public venue (WAC) was a difficult process that revealed some limitations of the original piece. For example, its short running time allowed our original audience to attend once or remain for the full durational cycle.

However, *Discords* was placed in a completely different context when it was programmed alongside our adaptation of Gogol’s *Diary of a Madman* in the WAC Studio. While attempts were made to place the two pieces ‘in conversation’ through choreographed transitions between them, the Gogol was a professional touring production and *Discords* was an open-ended experiment. Upon reflection, I compromised some of the latter’s experimental status by positioning it as finished work for a paying audience. Indeed, the mechanical approach of *Discords* in an entertainment venue paradoxically seemed to expose both sterility and fragility in the piece (see *Figure 1.6*). In this image, the increased distance between the ‘discords’ looked visually striking but it sacrificed some of the intimacy of its first staging. Also, the experimental piece had been extended in length in order to justify its inclusion within the double-bill. Upon reflection,

this was an error as it was much more effective as a short ‘theatre machine’ in the spirit of Beckett’s *Play* or *Not I*. I had forgotten the simple guiding principle that ‘less is more’ (and mistakenly thought that ‘more is more’), when moving experimental work into the theatrical marketplace. This is an interesting parallel with the 1964 pairing of Beckett’s *Play* in double-bill with Seneca’s *Philoctetes*.



Figure 1.6: *Discords* (2011)

[See *Discords* video at 22m30s on CD-Rom]

In the PaR experiments that followed *Discords*, I would focus on a specific physicality drawn from Beckett, and less on his representational aesthetics. As the reader may discern from *Endlessness* (2011) and *Fail Better Fragments* (2012) the practice shifted as a result of the research, emphasizing the experience of the participant and the corporeality of the performer. In making this shift, I have processed the *Discords* digital documentation alongside oral histories of practitioners and performers. For Whitelaw, there is a corporeal immediacy in practicing Beckett: ‘Right, let you skin fall off, let your

flesh fall off, let the muscles fall off, let the bones fall off, let everything fall off' (1995: 127–8). This account related to her performances of *Not I*, a play that often creates a visceral response and demands a *disciplined player*. This apparent oxymoron will be explored in the next section, where I will be interested in the inherited corporealities across generations of performers.

iv. 'Corporeal laboratories' (Overview)

In this final sub-section, I would like to position our PaR experiments within wider understandings of embodiment that echo McMullan's description of Beckett's 'corporeal laboratories' (2010: 57). The experimental performances at the CAPITAL Centre (2010), where a small audience had sat beneath the 'theatre machine' with the 'discords' appearing above their heads created an intimate encounter. However, in the WAC Studio (2011) the piece stood as a 'stage object' (cf. Brook, 1990) that introduced both physical and emotional distance. Some audience members expressed their bafflement or hostility to the piece, somewhat reminiscent of the reviewers for the 1964 production of *Play*. In overemphasizing the mechanical attributes of the piece, we had neglected the organic factors or improvised elements. To some extent, this perpetuated the *organic/mechanical* problem, rather than providing a solution through devised performance. For example, the laughter in the 1964 Old Vic audience seemed to emerge as a result of the pace of delivery (which Tynan had tried to censor), and our 2010 audiences sat at close proximity to the 'discords', which seemed to excite our younger spectators. In both of these examples, the audience responses need to be viewed as part of the experimental processes. As this thesis moves on, the reader may notice different strategies for audience engagement, such as 'work-in-progress' performance (*Endlessness*) and participatory installation (*Fail Better Fragments*).

To explore this shift in our practice, I will first interrogate the archival elements in the *Discords* experiments by drawing on materials from Beckett studies. According to *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Vol. IV* (Gontarski, 1999), Beckett's 'post-*Play* plays' formed a 'late style' when he was 're-creating his dramatic corpus, reinventing himself as a dramatist, rewriting history in effect during this mid-1960s period' (xv). As Gontarski notes, this is largely ignored by pre-millennial theatre history, and so our experiment self-consciously responded to this lacuna, by emphasizing Beckett's legacy *as a practitioner*. As part of the PaR experiments, the *Notebooks* were not only consulted, but actively 'workshopped'. For example, early in the process the sub-divisions of Lucky's tirade in *Warten Auf Godot* (dir. Beckett, 1975) were used as a devising activity where Beckett's own handwritten notes were used for new physical action (e.g. creating the 'abode of stones'). In the case of *Play*, the 'red notebook' for *Spiel* (dir. Beckett, 1978) was used to inform the devising systems for *Discords*, especially the geometric approach to physical action and the use of musical conventions (e.g. scoring the chorus). This was a surprising feature of the experiments, as it had been hoped that the minimalism of Beckett's style would inform the dramaturgy, rather than his practical strategies for scoring text or his highly disciplinary approach as a theatre practitioner in his own right.

My conception of 'the archive' included practitioners' oral histories and other records of performers' experience (an approach that evolved early on in the process). As explored above, important examples of actors' experiences with Beckett in rehearsal featured heavily in the laboratory process, and two films were screened for the ensemble: *Not I* (BBC, 1975), performed by Billie Whitelaw, and *Play* (RTE, 2000), performed by Alan Rickman, Kristen Scott-Thomas and Juliet Stephenson. The point of these screenings was to identify a specific 'energy' for performance, as each demonstrates the pace, delivery and intensity required to achieve a particular 'Beckettian' aesthetics of

production. The earlier experience of performers became as significant to our practice as the scholarly work of historians and theorists.

To take Whitelaw as example, her *Not I* was used throughout the PaR process as reference point, archival object, *and* creative stimulus. I undertook archival research that focused on her contribution to Beckett's 'late style' and her involvement in *Play* (BL, 1964: NP739W). Not only does Whitelaw have another history as a non-Beckettian performer (from child actress, to *Theatre Workshop* and film acting) but she insists on underplaying her own importance in relation Beckett's cultural significance. For example, she describes an accidental – even unhappy – first encounter with *Play*:

I was presented with this short, extraordinary piece. I went home to read it. My first thought was: what the hell am I going to do with this? My second thought: what a pity the Lope de Vega [Devine's first choice] fell through. I had no idea what *Play* meant. (Whitelaw, 1995: 76)

She openly acknowledges that: 'I'd hardly heard of Samuel Beckett' but her instinct, upon a second reading, demonstrated her sensitivity for his work; 'don't worry if you don't understand it, but do it fast' (76). It would seem that her *tacit* knowledge, regarding the pace of the performance, became an object of indulgence for Tynan and a matter of principle for Devine. For Beckett and Whitelaw, it was simply 'a specific human condition' (76).

This anecdotal evidence produced a counter-weight in our experimental process, especially the contrast with Beckett's theatrical notebooks which opened up a valid interpretative space for the performers' own subjective responses. Whitelaw articulates a 'sneaking feeling about where we had to get to with *Play*, which was to go very, very fast, almost incomprehensibly fast. I therefore wasn't particularly interested in an analysis of the play or the characters' (77). Whitelaw's description of the rehearsal process confirms

my own reading of the archival materials (production records, financial administration, show reports etc.). In her autobiography, she recalls:

At rehearsals Sam continued to say very little. What he had to say he said very concisely: ‘You can’t go too fast for me,’ was one note via George. ‘Don’t act out the story,’ was another. Later, when we worked together on other plays, he would reiterate over and over again: ‘No, no, that’s too much colour, too much colour,’ clearly a euphemism for ‘please don’t act’ (1995: 80).

While Beckett’s practice has built up a history of censure, his methods were radically collaborative. This will be explored further in the next section, as it informed our PaR experiments directly.

Ultimately, the main value of our experiment was claiming a freedom to devise with a range of theatrical materials, but guided by Beckettian aesthetics. This included the creating a performance text specifically for the devising ensemble, which I drafted and edited (see *Discords* script on CD-Rom). Perhaps the most significant point of comparison between *Play* and *Discords* is the ‘*Repeat play*’ stage direction where ‘the element of variation’ became the territory for our subsequent Beckettian experiments:

MOVEMENTS 7-12 repeat the same text in the same sequence but with different Laban variations. (*Discords*, 2011)

[Cf. REPEAT: The repeat may be an exact replica of the first statement or it may present an element of variation. (Beckett, 1964: 24)]

Seeking an experimental strategy that used Beckett to experiment – rather than experimenting on Beckett – our process made use of archival materials to create new work, as it were, *after* Beckett. In doing so, it applied Beckett’s dramaturgy to new environments: durational performance, pedagogic activities, festival contexts and revival

as experimentation. A visceral performance score animating a series of disembodied heads became our response to the *organic/mechanical* problem, as exemplified by the 1964 Devine rehearsal process. However, I also had a responsibility to protect the practice from mere historical re-construction (i.e. non-reflexive repetition). In order to achieve that, I aimed to ensure that the experiments themselves were indirectly informed, rather than directly influenced, by the archive. The *plasticity* of this approach ensured that the practice was reflexive and open to flux. Our ensemble had to be aware of the material conditions acting upon their bodies and, to borrow from *Echo's Bones*, the 'dense tissue of corporeal hereditaments' (Beckett, 2014: 4) that preceded them.

IV. **'Corporeal hereditaments': on repeating *Play***

In this final section I will position the *organic/mechanical* problem within its wider context in order to develop an understanding of Beckett's 'corporeal hereditaments' alongside his 'corporeal laboratories' (McMullan, 2010: 57). As explored in the Introduction, the modernist body in nineteenth-century performance was imagined as a 'reflex machine' that stages a problem between 'machinery and organisms' (Roach, 1993: 117). Furthermore, early-twentieth century neurologists imagined the brain as a machine constructing organic consciousness, with Santiago Ramon y Cajal being the first to describe the nervous system as 'organic machinery' in 1904 (Salisbury and Shail, 2010). I will use this biological imagery to re-consider the 'performative laboratory of Samuel Beckett's theatre of the body' (McMullan, 2010: 141) a way of articulating the embodiments in *Play* and *Discords*. I will also use contemporary scientific writing (Damasio, 1999; Malabou, 2008) to create a bridge to Chapter 2. First, however, I will re-consider this chapter's practical research and its status within a contemporary understanding of Beckett in performance.

The problem of experimenting with Beckett in performance has been of central importance to my analysis, and Catherine Laws has noted that:

[To] the considerable, obsessive machine of “Beckett Studies” Beckett seemed at one and the same time too difficult and too experimental, still, for the mainstream, but somehow too passé for explicit consideration by those at the “cutting-edge” of contemporary practices (2007: 1)

This chapter has responded by offering a new approach, one that is influenced by ‘the archive’, but open to formal experimentation through practice. While particular examples of 1960s British theatre history were my key reference points, other options were available. Joseph Chaikin, for example, working with the Open Theater in New York, conducted experiments in form that have an important place in laboratory theatres of the post-war period. Chaikin’s work on Beckett is also particularly significant; especially his *Endgame* (1970) and the late piece *what is the word* (1989). He articulated Beckett’s contribution as follows: ‘His world acts on you. It enlarges you. It reduces you. It mechanizes you’ (Chaikin, 1972: 137). This apparently paradoxical statement has a particular resonance in a ‘live art’ context. For example, Derval Tubridy has argued that:

Thinking about Beckett in the context of Performance Art enables us to reconsider elements vital to his theatre: the experience of the body in space in terms of duration and endurance; the role of repetition, reiteration and rehearsal; and the visceral interplay between language and the body’ (2014: 49–50).

Placing Chaikin’s statement alongside Tubridy’s argument raises a further point about embodiment in Beckettian performance. Within these embodied conditions, one can simultaneously enlarge and reduce, endure and repeat, *affect* and systemize: all apparent contradictions. However, within the ‘performative laboratory’ of Beckettian embodiment there is often an internal logic. Paradoxically ‘the body’ (that difficult object of study)

becomes an experimental subject for theatrical mechanisms to *affect* performing organisms. I suggest that *Play* and *Discords* reproduced a specific condition of human embodiment that was at once highly controlled *and* radically collaborative. To explore this claim in more detail, I will reconsider both experiments using Ramon y Cajal's concept of the nervous system as *organic machinery*¹², especially its implications for performance. The 1964 review describing the 'rotted' heads of *Play* as 'bleeping like electronic machines' has a parallel with Ramon y Cajal's 'ingenious machines':

All syllables are programmed to have the same value, quite like an oscilloscope I once met in Jerusalem [sic.]. End of sensation. They still bleep ten, twenty, thirty minutes later, by which time, like well-regulated mechanisms, they have come round to the beginning once more.

(RNT/PR/4/1/4)

For Salisbury and Shail: 'accounts that confirmed and popularized the image of the body as suffused with an intricate one-directional electrical circuit' (2010: 25) and this affected theatrical production in the modernist period. In parallel, the theatre was revolutionized through technologies of lighting and sound, used most notably by Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) and Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966). As Mark Taylor-Batty has shown in *Roger Blin* (2007), Beckett's own exposure to theatre during this period included an engagement with 'fin-de-siècle' forms (i.e. the Parisian symbolists and surrealists). Lighting, sound and stage technology remain a particularly important feature of Beckettian production to this day. Furthermore, Beckett's own fascination with the technology of embodiment has been extensively covered in recent Beckett scholarship (see Maude, 2009). The

¹² In the *Histology of the Nervous System of Man and Vertebrates* (1904), Ramon y Cajal writes: 'the *organic machinery* of the nervous system is indeed comparable... to such ingenious machines as the music box, camera, phonograph, and so on, where simple finger pressure on a spring, or the weight of an inserted coin, activates the whole series of coordinated events the machine was designed to carry out' (in Salisbury and Shail, 2010).

technological innovations within stagecraft during Beckett's dramatic career were seismic, and by the 1980s he was experimenting with the new possibilities of televisual media *as a practitioner*. Seen from this perspective, his earlier experiments in the 1960s reveal the electrical charge of 'organic machinery' in performance.

While exploring this paradigm as part of the PaR process for *Discords*, we were preparing to work directly with psychiatrists and neurologists (see *Beckett and Brain Science*, 2012). This collaboration led to my reconceptualization of highly regulated rehearsal as an *organic/mechanical* system, rather than a 'de-humanising' system. When Tynan wrote to Devine, asking him to 're-humanise' *Play* for the Old Vic audiences, he fundamentally misunderstood the experimental processes at work. In the same way, when we imagined *Discords* as a 'theatre machine' we initially misconceived the project as a disciplinary process (exploring meta-theatrical drama on stage), rather than a multidisciplinary event (beginning collaborations with university scientists). It was through the discursive re-iteration of PaR documentation that I have been able to reposition a *theatre* project as a piece of *performance* research with transdisciplinary applications.

This has been made possible as a result of considering Beckettian embodiment as a transdisciplinary research process rather than a multidisciplinary object of study. Therefore, I will be drawing upon biomedical and 'scientific' studies, as much as theatre and performance research. Karin Knorr Cetina, in her *Epistemic Cultures* (1999), makes an important distinction between the fields of biology and physics in her study of laboratories: 'one transforms machines into physiological beings [physics]; the other transforms organisms into machines [biology]' (1999: 4). I would consider the dramatic equivalence of this as the distinction often made between theatrical *production* (where mechanical systems coalesce during an organic event) and performance *process* (where organic events evolve into a repeated sequence of physical actions). Zarrilli puts the case as follows:

We should always engage the open-ended dialogical question of how our knowledges ‘about’, ‘for’, and ‘in’ continuously inform each other, and are not simplistically dichotomized. Our problem is to keep this dynamic dialectic constantly ‘alive’, to have artists and scholars of performance join those scientists who are rigorously exploring the ‘biological and phenomenological’ and thereby building bridges ‘between mind in science and mind in experience’ [Varela, 1991: xv].

(Zarrilli, 2001: 44)

I have also found it rewarding to consider the *organic/mechanical* problem in relation to neuroscience where consciousness can be studied as ‘the embodied mind’. Embodied cognition is rooted in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and developed by subsequent thinkers (including Bateson and Varela). Damasio is also associated with this idea and he makes an important distinction between the *organism* and the *object*: ‘That the organism is involved in relating to some object, and that the object in the relation is causing a change in the organism’ (133). Damasio’s emphasis on the *relationships* between organism and object is particularly helpful here in that it focuses on a material network beyond the organism itself. As I have shown with Devine’s production of *Play* and Fail Better’s experiments with *Discords*, the human body (organism) is placed in a mechanical relationship with stage technology (object). For example, the light in *Play* emerges as an antagonist – a goad – that reduces the protagonists’ agency to a series of reflexes. The characters themselves are cast as Pavlovian dogs (or laboratory rats) and the relationship between their own organism and the object/light constructs their consciousness as a series of embodied minds (*‘Am I as much as being seen?’*). In the case of *Discords*, the same material conditions were replicated, though with nine (as opposed to three) disembodied heads. Our experiments also explored the characters’ agency in moving from vent to vent, but each head was ultimately trapped within the ‘theatre machine’ and condemned

to 'repeat play'. Before I conclude, I would like to explore one further perspective from the neurosciences.

In his preface to Catherine Malabou's *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* Slavoj Žižek writes that Malabou employs: 'a Hegelian reading of the neurosciences, based on the concept of *plasticity*, and she reflects upon the uncanny parallels between the model of human mind proposed by neuroscientists and the structure of today's capitalism' (2008). Malabou's translator Marc Jeannerod also notes that 'the brain has always been described in terms of technological metaphors... in the digital age, as a computer running its programs' (xi). In a parallel to Foucault's 'discipline-mechanism' (1991[1977]), this concept invites us to view the machine metaphor suspiciously, for it mimics authoritarian models of human power, a criticism often associated with Beckett in the theatre (cf. Connor, 1988). However, Malabou offers us an alternative to the 'machine brain' in her notion of brain-plasticity whereby: 'the machine learns, differentiates itself, reconstructs itself' (2008: xii). If we extend this thought into the realm of performance, it is possible to argue that the *plasticity* of ludic practice offers an alternative to mechanical reproduction. The elasticity of production and the fixity of its representational practices are closed to the more radical elements of creative process (i.e. the *plasticity* of PaR). For Fleishman, PaR: 'expresses itself through a repeated, though flexible and open-ended, process of ontogenesis' (2012: 34) and is therefore open to flux.

The *plasticity* of performance (in its PaR mode) enables a mechanical operation to reconstruct itself through organic process. I would suggest that Fleishman's *ontogenesis* (the development of an organism) has a parallel in Malabou's *plasticity* (the capacity to be altered) when we consider human embodiment. That both of their arguments are broadly phenomenological is also worth mentioning here. Malabou's opens up new distributions of power by observing that the brain is not 'a control center', but that 'the biological and the social mirror in each other this new figure of command' (33). Her elision of organism

and mechanism into one embodied mind has enabled me to re-think Beckettian embodiment in relation to *neuroplasticity*. This idea has currency within contemporary neuroscience as the: ‘capacity of neurons and neural networks in the brain to change their connections and behaviours in responses to new information, sensory stimulation, development, damage or dysfunction’ (*Encyclopedia Britannica* website, 2014). In Malabou’s hands, this scientific concept becomes a political challenge: ‘we must insist on this natural identity in returning to the notions of network, delocalization and adaptability, and in observing how these operate in the two domains – cerebral and socioeconomic’ (2008: 42). In the same way that Fleishman argues that PaR proceeds organically in ‘variable and indeterminate directions’ (2012: 34), Malabou imagines new practices for the human brain and new *plasticities* for human embodiment.

I conclude this chapter by returning to Beckett’s treatment of the *organic/mechanical* problem in performance. For example, the way light in *Play* constructs the organisms’ consciousness through mechanical interrogation:

W1: Weary of playing with me. Get off me. Yes.

Spot from W1 to M.

M: Looking for something. In my face. Some truth. In my eye. Not even.

Spot from M to W2. Laugh as before from W2 cut short as spot from her to M.

M: Mere eye. No mind. Opening and shutting on me. Am I as much –

Spot off M. Blackout. Three seconds. Spot on M.

M: Am I as much as ... being seen?

Spot off M. Blackout. Five seconds. Faint spots simultaneously on three faces. Three seconds. Voices faint, large unintelligible. (Beckett, 1964: 21–2)

Beckett’s infamous stage direction to: ‘*Repeat play*’, immediately after this dialogue, reinforces the ‘organic machinery’ of the heads in urns. W1, W2 and M are reduced to fleshy protrusions in a re-iterative system of embodiment, and the cyclical quality of the

piece suggests that their tormentor (Light) will never ‘weary of playing’ with them. As with the Auditor’s movements of ‘helpless compassion’ in *Not I* (1972) or May’s disrupted pacing in *Footfalls* (1976), the experimental corporealities of Beckett’s late theatre have proven rich stimuli for thinking about the *organic/mechanical* problem in performance. By adopting multidisciplinary perspectives from neurology (Ramon y Cajal, 1904; Damasio, 1999; Malabou, 2008), I have been able to re-imagine my PaR experiments as transdisciplinary vehicles for archival problems (i.e. *Play*, 1964) through practice (e.g. *Discords*, 2010). This thought process has opened up another important strand of inquiry for the thesis, namely the relationship between the *theatrical* and the *scientific* in performance. The next chapter will address this problem by using an archival example (i.e. *Theatre of Cruelty*, 1964) and a practical experiment (i.e. *Endlessness*, 2011).

Chapter 2

An experiment like the *Theatre of Cruelty*...

(Brook, SMT/PROG/1964/40)

I. *Theatre laboratories: on ‘betraying’ Artaud*

This chapter considers the *theatrical/scientific* problem in performance with reference to Peter Brook’s *Theatre of Cruelty (ToC)* season in 1964 and Fail Better’s *Endlessness* in 2011. It draws upon archival materials and practical experiments to articulate this problem as highly significant to: a) theatre historiography on the 1960s, b) the interdisciplinary potential of contemporary PaR and c) the ways in which scientific experiments are theatrical within themselves. Fundamentally, I am interested in what constitutes experimental research through performance practice, especially when artists explicitly claim their work to be ‘scientific’. My first example will explore the relevance of Antonin Artaud’s first ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ manifesto (1932) to the *ToC* experiments at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). My second example is from my own practice at the Pegasus Theatre Oxford where Fail Better Productions aimed to transform scientific writings into experimental theatre. Finally, the chapter will approach the *theatrical/scientific* problem in performance via a close analysis of ‘scientific’ theatre. I have defined this problem in relation to a complicated interdisciplinary category that consists of theatre about science, which exploits the performativity of the scientific method in order to produce a ‘scientific’ theatre. However, when Brook and Charles Marowitz conducted their *ToC* experiments, they mis-appropriated Artaud’s writings, including ‘Theatre and Science’ (1947), where ‘any idea of theatre and performance is ruled out’ (in Schumacher, 1989: 216). I will show how Brook ‘betrays’ the Artaudian conception of both the *theatrical* and the *scientific*, in order to regenerate his RSC projects. I will also attempt to investigate the relation between theatre and science in my own PaR work.

Social scientists and philosophers of science have contested the so-called objectivity of the scientific method.¹³ They have also critiqued the sciences and technologies of power, for example: ‘the Panoptican functions as a kind of *laboratory* of power. Thanks to its mechanisms of observation, it gains efficiency’ (Foucault, 1977: 204, emphasis added). In this chapter, I will respond to these tensions by exploring interdisciplinary accounts of scientific experimentation including *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Fact* (Latour and Woolgar, 1979) and *The Play of Nature: Experimentation as Performance* (Crease, 1993). I will also be informed by ‘scientific’ texts from theatre and performance studies, such as *Science on Stage: From Dr Faustus to Copenhagen* (Shepherd-Barr, 2006) and *Performing Science and the Virtual* (Case, 2007). However, there has been a robust field of ‘science studies’ within the academy since the 1960s (Thomas Kuhn et al.). While the history of studying scientific inquiry extends back to the early modern period, many scholars, including Bruno Latour, have discussed the contemporary notion of ‘science studies’ at length. In fact, these social scientists have made use of drama and storytelling in their descriptions of the field:

In opening the black box of scientific facts, we knew we would be opening Pandora’s box. There was no way to avoid it. It was tightly sealed as long as it remained in the two-culture no-man’s-land, buried among the cabbages and the turnips, blissfully ignored by the humanists trying to avoid all the dangers of objectification and by the epistemologists trying to fend off all the ills carried by the unruly mob. Now that it has been opened, with plagues and curses, sins and ills whirling around, there is only one thing to do, and that is to go even deeper, all the way down to the almost-empty box, in order to retrieve what, according to the venerable legend, has been left at the bottom – yes, *hope*. (Latour, 1999: 23)

¹³ This has in turn been contested by research scientists, e.g. Alan Sokal’s *Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity* (1996) of which he states: ‘One of my goals here is to make a small contribution toward a dialogue on the Left between humanists and natural scientists’ (1998: 268).

Latour's evocation of classical mythology here is another example of how *theatrical* the study of science can be, and how human emotion can drive scientific discovery. I will avoid grandiose statements such as the discovery of hope at the bottom of this thesis, but would like to use this chapter to find the *scientific* in performance. At the bottom of this chapter's box will be not hope, but *reflexivity*.¹⁴ However, I would now like to formally introduce the theatre practice under investigation in this chapter.

To fully understand the 1964 RSC experiment, it is necessary to elicit alternative perspectives from those working with Brook during this period. Ensemble member Glenda Jackson reflects upon Brook's method thus: 'someone once asked me what was the word that was most synonymous in my mind with working with Peter Brook, and the word is "No"' (Kustow, 2005: 143). Jackson was one of the few actors to take part in the *ToC* as well as its culmination in the RSC production *Marat/Sade*. Her comment is indicative of Brook's censorial approach during this period. He has subsequently reformulated his directorial method as 'elimination' (e.g. National Theatre Platform, 29 April 2013), which clearly had its roots in this period as Artaudian 'cruelty' or 'self-discipline' (Brook in Hunt and Reeves, 1995: 75). These alternative viewpoints, from both Jackson and Marowitz, demonstrate Brook's censorial approach within a rhetorically 'scientific' process. In his 1964 RSC programme note, Brook notes that these experiments were *like* 'a scientific research project' (SMT/PROG/1964/40). David Williams has described this phase in Brook's career as: 'a period of reappraisal, maturation and proactive research' (in Hodge, 2000: 175).

Brook deployed the Artaud's *cruelty* as self-discipline, strictness and elimination. As Artaud wrote in 1932: 'the word *cruelty* must be taken in its broadest sense, not in the physical, predatory sense usually ascribed to it' (in Schumacher, 1989: 119); similarly

¹⁴ I am aware that the term *reflexivity* has diverse interpretations and has been repositioned by philosophers of science, such as Karl Popper, plus sociologists including Anthony Giddens and historians of ideas, in particular Michel Foucault. Here, I will mean practice-about-practice.

Brook's use of the word 'elimination' has no murderous intent. Rather, Brook's retrospective description of his process as 'elimination' has more in common with the mathematical or medical sense of the word as an intended omission or removal (*OED*, 1998: 438).¹⁵ He focuses on the practical exercises undertaken and then discarded, but still assimilated by the actor in rehearsal. This suggests an alternative approach to theatrical production, implying a process of erasure and deletion, as opposed to creation and invention. Therefore, I use 'elimination' as an experimental principle in performance (assuming that 'less is more'), a dramaturgical convention that implies: 'strictness, diligence, unrelenting decisiveness, irreversible and absolute determination' (Artaud in Schumacher, 1989: 119). Kimberly Jannarone's *Artaud and His Doubles* (2012) argues that this marks a betrayal of Artaud as a performative invention of 1960s fringe theatre, which in turn influenced Brook's experiments with 'small means, intense work, rigorous discipline, absolute precision' (1990: 60). I will argue that Jannarone is correct to note Brook's misappropriation of Artaud's theory in his own work, but that her argument does not fully engage with the intense discipline and strict approach of Brook's practice in the 1960s.

As this chapter aims to demonstrate, the use of scientific terminology in this period of theatre practice was both problematic and paradigmatic, establishing new practices for experimental performance and creating new tensions within the British theatre. The British 'alternative theatres, 1946–2000' (Kershaw 2004: 349) represented a further evolutionary step between the 'mainstream' practices of the 1960s and the emergence of PaR by the 1990s. So, this chapter will suggest that contemporary PaR can respond to these gaps in theatre history by re-embodying theatrical problems in laboratory environments. Brook's use of Artaud (and my own use of Brook) is an

¹⁵ 'Elimination' implies expulsion (from the body), exclusion of clearance (from 'out'/'ex' & 'threshold'/'limen'). (*Online Etymology Dictionary* website, 2014).

example of the *theatrical/scientific* problem in performance, an inquiry into experimental practices that claim to explore the scientific method through performance (see Shepherd-Barr, 2006; Case, 2007; Nicholson, 2011).

In the fifty years that separate *Endlessness* from the ‘scientific research’ of Brook, there has been a ‘postdramatic’ turn in some areas of theatre practice, leading Shepherd-Barr to notice that: ‘a second wave of recent science plays is quietly changing the ways we think about science on stage, linking performance techniques and science in innovative ways that move away from the literary and historical’ (2006: 199). For *Endlessness*, Fail Better created a devised performance style that would mix the literary/historical with the scientific/philosophical and we started testing this approach throughout the project. As Shepherd-Barr writes: ‘many of these newer, alternative plays share theatrical approaches and methodologies. They also stretch traditional notions of time and space in the theater’ (214). For Shepherd-Barr, these specific ‘science-performance pieces’ can be differentiated from generic ‘postdramatic works’, and they emerge as a healthy and thriving genre’ (217) in their own right. Some time before this (in 1947), Artaud recommended a ‘true theatre... in which any idea of theatre and performance is ruled out, as well as any idea of science, religion and art’ (in Schumacher, 1989: 216). In his final years, Artaud imagined replacing theatre with a practice that ‘aims at the true organic and physical transformation of the body’ because ‘theatre is not a scenic display’ but a crucible where ‘bodies are renewed’ (216). However, Artaud’s writing can only be applied to new ‘postdramatic’ and interdisciplinary practices through a process of betrayal (as in transformative application). In this way, contemporary PaR shares some features with Brook’s 1960s experiments.

I will extend this inquiry by recalling other occasions when theatre practice stood in for ‘scientific research’. Although I will be focusing upon Brook and Marowitz in 1964, I will also be informed by research on Grotowski’s ‘Teatr Laboratorium’ (see

Schino, 2009; Flaszen, 2010), which had already influenced Brook by this time (see Brook in Grotowski, 1968). By exploring these experiments as well as scientific writing, this chapter positions theatre practice *as research* in a historical context, making use of the performative discourse of other disciplines, but treating history, philosophy, and even science, as reflexive practices (each with their own storytelling traditions, as Latour and Woolgar have documented in *Laboratory Life*, 1979). For example, in 1963 Peter Hall (then Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company) enabled Brook to create an ensemble with full subsidy for twelve actors to explore theatrical technique. Although this ‘experimental group’ was absorbed later by the repertory company, Hall had taken a huge risk on practice *as research*, even within the 1960s ‘urge for renewal’ (Fowler, 2005: 119).

In the programme distributed at LAMDA for the *TōC* season, Brook argues that ‘an experiment like the *TōC* needs total subsidy; that is enough money to cover costs even if no tickets were sold’ (SMT/PROG/1964/40). At the RSC, Brook’s theatre laboratory had functioned ‘mainly in private’, although various iterations of these experiments were shown in front of an audience. Paul Ableman contributed four texts for performance, Brook had written two, John Arden’s *Ars Longa, Vita Brevis* (1964, with Margaretta D’Arcy) was a regular part of the event, as were Marowitz’s adaptation of *Hamlet* and the UK premiere of Artaud’s *Spurt of Blood* (1925). According to the prompt book in the RSC archive, the Arden text would be substituted for scene fifteen of Genet’s *The Screens*, which initiated the process of the company preparing to stage this play in full production (later abandoned for *Marat/Sade*). Although Brook’s experiments claimed to be ‘scientific research’, they were in fact highly text-based in performance although there is evidence that improvisation featured alongside scripted dialogue.

Furthermore, Brook was being somewhat disingenuous about the ‘purity’ of his experiments, as this process was initially driven by the need to train a group of

performers to work on Genet's play. Even though the Lord Chamberlain had denied permission to perform this work, Hall was keen that this period of investment should lead to a production with box office income. These unusual circumstances lead to Brook's satirical inclusion of 'Letter from the Lord Chamberlain' as a theatrical sketch within the *ToC* evening, and to a premature announcement in his programme notes: 'The climax, after more public performances at LAMDA in the spring, will be a full-scale production of Jean Genet's "The Screens" at the Aldwych Theatre in June'. This tendency to over-promise recalls other criticisms of Brook as a 'second-hand genius' (Mitter, 1992: 5) whose professional identity hovers between 'Brook the showman' and 'Brook the scientist' (Hunt and Reeves, 1995: 76). As Declan Donnellan has noted: 'the actual moment of showmanship is the moment of profundity... The thing that's completely unique about Peter is his possession of both those poles [the sacred and the profane]' (in Kustow 2005: 293). As I have introduced above, this chapter is focused upon the polarities of the *theatrical* and the *scientific* in the Brook's Artaudian practices as well as contemporary PaR.

II. 'Observe us at play': *cruel* experiments

I will now begin to consider the details of the *ToC* experiments, especially those aspects that draw attention to the 'scientific' and experimental features introduced above. One of the dramatic fragments used in the 1964 experiments was *Spine* by Paul Ableman containing the lines: 'Observe us at play/Kindly watch us at play.' In the promptbook in the RSC archive, there is the hand-written addition 'Watch us at play', inserted between the two lines. While this was no doubt a late textual amendment during rehearsal (perhaps for rhythmic purposes), the lines have a special resonance in relation to the *reflexivity* of experiment and observation:

4. Observe us at play.

3. Watch us at play. [*Insert*]

4. Kindly watch us play.

(RSC/SM/1/1964/THC1)

These lines could describe Brook's laboratory itself; a playground observed 'scientifically'. As Alan Read has noted, the theatre itself can be understood as a 'human laboratory' (2008: 2), but in the *process* of a theatre laboratory there is a specific condition of human experiment; an interplay between observation and embodiment constructing research evidence. In short, the human observes *itself*, studies its *own* behaviours and decodes its *own* languages, a process which was under investigation in Brook's logocentric research questioning: 'Is there a language of actions, a language of sounds – a language of word-as-part of-movement, of word-as-lie, word-as-parody, of word-as-rubbish, of word-as-contradiction, of word-shock or word-cry?' (Brook, 1990: 55). He had 'instituted [the *ToC*] to investigate these questions and to try and learn for ourselves what a holy theatre might be' (55) and apparently it needed an authorial label. However problematically, Brook and Marowitz cited the writings and practices of Artaud, as did many other experimentalists of this period (e.g. Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre). 'The title was by way of homage to Artaud,' states Brook, 'but it did not mean that we were trying to reconstruct Artaud's own theatre' (55).

The following section aims to articulate a paradox of the theatre laboratory, which is that it is neither completely *theatrical* nor coherently *scientific*. The application of scientific discourses and methods to the performing arts has a diverse and complex history, from the *fin-de-siècle*, when Stanislavski and associates developed a richly psychological naturalism (see Pitches, 2009) to the quasi-scientific prose that Artaud applied to theatre ('Theatre and Science', 1947) and Laban applied to movement (*Effort*, also 1947) in the period immediately after World War II. I will argue for a third way,

where the fallibility of experimentation itself will enrich both artistic and scientific epistemologies. By taking this synthetic approach I hope to show that the rigorous observation of ludic activities can yield interdisciplinary knowledge through reflexive practice. I will pay special attention to practitioners' records, exemplified here by Marowitz's *ToC* notes:

No two audiences saw the same show, and so no two people from different audiences could recount the same memories. Towards this end, roles were swapped (frequently at the last moment); bits altered or dropped, and one piece (written by Paul Ableman) completely unstaged [*sic*] and unrehearsed, played out each night as the spirit happened to move the actors. (1988: 47)

Marowitz describes the 'self-delusion' (46) that Brook and he imagined would protect the performances as laboratory demonstrations, keeping them somehow immune from a critical response. The list of activities that constituted 'experiment' during this process could seem almost conventional to the present-day practitioner. That said, these improvisations were extremely challenging to performers trained in naturalism, described by Marowitz as: 'a grounding in Stanislavski techniques as attenuated and distorted by English drama schools... [undone by] plunging a group of twelve young actors and actresses into the swirling waters of Artaudian theory' (36).

More specifically, Marowitz documents areas of practice that constituted 'a completely new audition technique' including: "disrupted set piece... text and sub-text... object associations... [and] discontinuous improvisation" (34–5). In fact, *discontinuity* emerges as 'a style of acting... which corresponded to the broken and fragmentary way in which most people experience contemporary reality' (38). Jackson, in contrast, recalls this process as: 'an oasis in a desert... essentially he was looking for something that was not rooted – as I think British theatre was at that time – in a literary exposition of emotion' (Kustow, 2005: 139). Marowitz challenges this understanding of the process

with reference to Stanislavski and Artaud, before claiming: ‘there is no fundamental disagreement between the Method actor and the Artaudian actor’ (1988: 43). Arguing that both types of actor are seeking the unconscious, and ultimately locating this *beyond* the scientific, Marowitz notes that Artaudian acting also needs Method acting: ‘in order to verify the nature of the feelings he is releasing... even Artaud’s celebrated actor-in-trance is responsible to the spirit that is speaking through him’ (43).

Some years later, in the second of only two references to Artaudian acting in his 1998 memoir, Brook repeats Artaud’s metaphor of ‘the victim at the stake desperately signalling through the flames’ (1998: 196). Yet, in an earlier reference, he plays down the central significance of Artaud to the LAMDA project:

We called it ‘the Theatre of Cruelty’ as a salute to Antonin Artaud, for although theatre theory had never interested me much and I found in Artaud’s extreme visions very few of the specifics that practical work demands, both Marowitz and I admired the burning intensity of the positions Artaud took in relation to the safe theatre of his day (134).

In fact, Marowitz goes even further in dissociating from the resonances of the ‘unfortunate’ title, and he re-positions his Stanislavski-Artaud binary as one between *traditional* actors and *modern* actors. He argues that the former, ‘academy-bred, re-orientated’, and the latter, ‘who have passed through the Royal Court, Theatre Workshop, and the ferment of the last ten years’ (1988: 44), differ in a series of ways, best summed up with the distinction: ‘Trads: *My many years of professional experience convince me that...* / Mods: *Nothing is ever the same*’ (45).

The experiments of the *ToC* claimed to address this rift, creating a developmental space for this new kind of actor. In this respect, one wonders if the outcomes of the process were pedagogic rather than scientific. For example, Jackson went on to perform in *The Screens* and the *Marat/Sade*, where both productions demanded this new open

approach. Brook was calling for a seemingly paradoxical incarnation of both rough *and* holy qualities in a process that was neither *theatrical* nor *scientific*. This emerges as one of the aspects of practice where Brook is channeling an ahistorical Artaud. As he would argue in *The Empty Space*, the actor should ‘communicate his invisible meanings’, adding, ‘this is what some theatres call magic, others science, but it’s the same thing. An invisible idea was rightly shown’ (1990: 57).

As Marowitz notes: ‘trance itself is arrived at methodically. The medium’s secret is knowing when to let go of the mechanisms that have produced it, in order to transcend them’ (1988: 43). Brook seemed to be seeking a laboratory theatre based on Grotowskian experiment, shaped by his reading of Beckett’s plays as ‘theatre machines’ and his understanding of Merce Cunningham’s dance practice as ‘holy’. In his preface for *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968) Brook writes: ‘[Grotowski] calls his theatre a laboratory. It is. It is a centre of research... as in all true laboratories the experiments are scientifically valid because the essential conditions are observed’ (1976: 11). Giving ‘each actor a series of shocks’, Grotowski had worked for two weeks with the same group that emerged from the 1964 experiments, but this process is considered untranslatable, ‘such work is only free if it is in confidence’ and it is also ‘essentially non-verbal’ (11).

Describing the Living Theatre’s laboratory practice, Brook describes the problem of 1960s experimental theatre practice as: ‘a rich but dangerous eclecticism’ (1990: 70). However, this is especially apparent with his own (mis)use of Artaud during this period which I will now deal with explicitly. Indeed Brook’s statement that ‘Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed’ (1990: 60) suggests that his own *ToC* experiments were deeply flawed from the outset and Marowitz reports Brook ‘plunging a group of twelve young actors into the swirling waters of Artaudian theory’ (in Williams, 1988: 36). The short time-scale of the *ToC* experiments was the main rationale for this ‘plunge’, and Marowitz suggests in 1965 that the Artaudian title was overblown. According to Michael Kustow: ‘Brook

does not recall when he had first read Artaud's texts' (2005: 138). He also records the influence of Joseph Chaikin: 'an ex-Living Theatre actor who had started his own company, inspired by Artaudian ideas' (138). Brook also discusses Malina and Beck's Living Theatre – 'exemplary in so many ways' (1990: 70) – in his 'Holy Theatre' essay, where he also identifies an 'essential dilemma' for this group: Searching for holiness without tradition, without source, it is compelled to turn to many traditions, many sources – yoga, Zen, psychoanalysis, books, hearsay, discovery, inspiration – a rich but dangerous eclecticism. (70)

This hybridity of practice informs Shomit Mitter's criticism of Brook's 'unity of indiscriminate amalgamation', which makes him 'a second hand genius of formidable synoptic power' (1992: 5). Building on this critique, I would suggest that Brook was guilty of the very same problem that he observed in the work of the Living Theatre: 'For the method that leads to what they are seeking cannot be an additive one. To subtract, to strip away can only be effected in the light of some constant. They [the Living Theatre] are still in search of this constant' (1990: 70). Indeed, Brook was searching for this constant also, as Mitter demonstrates in his comprehensive account of a restless artist imitating and discarding first Stanislavski, then Brecht and finally Grotowski. Although Brook's 'rich but dangerous eclecticism' is quite literally his *own* problem, Mitter does not fully articulate Brook's strategy of elimination and its role in shaping his 'multi-faceted ontology in performance' (1992: 135). In my view, Brook did this, not by 'uniting rough and holy in *Le Mahabharata*' as Mitter suggests, but much earlier in his 1964 RSC experiments, which prepared the ground for his 'seminal' work, such as *Marat/Sade* on stage in 1965 or *King Lear* on film in 1970. By these later productions, Brook has repurposed Artaud's *cruelty* as 'elimination'.

For the remainder of this section, I would like to consider social and political problems associated with Brook's experiment and prepare the reader for my own PaR

project. The specific interdisciplinary problem of the *theatrical/scientific* in tension with each other in performance will emerge as a ‘rich but dangerous eclecticism’. This eclecticism will productively blur distinctions between the arts and the sciences, and move towards Latour’s aspiration that we might locate hope at the bottom of the ‘black box of scientific facts’ (1999: 23).

Taking the lead from Artaud’s original writings, especially ‘The Theatre of Cruelty’ (1932) and ‘Theatre and Science’ (1947), my argument recalls Jannarone’s thesis that: ‘for all his anti-rational, anti-individual, anti-democratic thinking, [Artaud] has been canonized – sanctified, even – by artists and intellectuals who strive toward a more progressive, liberal, and democratic society in which informed, empowered, and tolerant individuals play a key role’ (2012: 189). Jannarone’s ‘examinations situate Artaud in his historical moment, one in which aesthetic fantasies translated far too easily into calamitous politics’ (28) and her argument has a strong revisionist thrust. While Brook emerges as one in a series of misappropriating practitioners, my case study reveals him as far more of a disciplined and strict taskmaster than most realize. From the point of view of the 1960s shift, during which time Jannarone claims that Artaud was misunderstood, I would argue that the practitioners ‘betraying’ Artaud had far more *cruelty* (as self-discipline, strictness or elimination) than the established narratives have shown (e.g. Williams, 1988, Mitter, 1992, Kustow, 2005). This point requires further elaboration, especially in respect of the detail in Jannarone’s account of the 1960s ‘Artaudians’.

While Jannarone identifies a tension between the ‘anti-democratic’ Artaud and the ‘progressive’ artists that followed, I would emphasize instead the interdisciplinary value of this difference. She takes on this contradiction directly, locating the problem in the 1960s: ‘a time when all limits were considered bad limits, and the urge to lose oneself in something bigger paradoxically accompanied a dedication to self-discovery’ (2012: 190). She particularly notes the appropriation of Artaud in the work of Schechner, Brook

and Sontag who were: ‘effectively keeping him in the realm of the spiritual “other” and reinforcing the sense of him being uniquely out of time’ (195). However, the movement to make theatre more ‘scientific’ has undoubtedly been influenced by Artaud, where he intended this or not. From the Living Theatre (see Jannarone, 2012: 195) to Odin Teatret (see Schino, 2009: 26), the ‘theatre laboratory’ has frequently been positioned in relation to Artaud. Although, ‘Artaud was notoriously alien to theatre experimentation, the avant-garde and pedagogy, even more so in his last years’ (Ruffini in Schino, 2009: 99), he nonetheless inspired a ‘scientific’ paradigm in performance practice. His own ‘Theatre and Science’, for example, talks of a ‘total physiological revolution’ (see Schumacher, 1989: 220).

Jannarone is correct to identify political risks in Artaudian practices. She devotes a significant part of her thesis to crowd theory and the surrender of selfhood implicit in Artaudian work. Her approach exposes flaws in the claims of 1960s practitioners when positioning the ecstatic freedom experienced by the crowd/ensemble as liberated/progressive. She argues that it is either aesthetically fetishized, ‘by those such as Judith Malina and Julian Beck’ (197), or ethically fetishized, for example, by Richard Schechner, in ‘seeking the “right” kind of theatrical ecstasy at the time’ (2012: 194). I would suggest that ecstasy (and other extreme human energies) could be contained by the laboratory and re-formulated in new experimental ways, as Ludwik Flaszen explains:

In the case of Artaud or Grotowski, a transformer and a catalyst of ‘cosmic’ energies, latent in the human being in potential state. Their controlled explosion makes the actor become a holy man, a priest of maybe forgotten today but eternal rituals of initiation... What Artaud and Grotowski proposed was archaic and innovative at the same time. (2010: 191)

Jannarone spends a significant proportion of her argument warning us about the violence of Artaud’s writing and practices. However, the *ToC* found its ultimate venue in the

theatre laboratories of the 1960s. These were places that could control explosions and contain highly volatile energies, in safe and secure ways. As Eugenio Barba explains: ‘the laboratory is the place bombs are patiently tested; this is especially true for a theatre laboratory’ (Schino, 2009: 31). It is the experimental rigour of laboratory processes where the most difficult and challenging performance problems can be explored. Grotowski, Brook, Chaikin, Barba et al. were therefore creating the most appropriate environment for their understanding of Artaud’s *ToC*, rather than inflicting its extremes on the general public. What I would like to add to Jannarone’s analysis, therefore, is that Artaud only failed in relation to the theatre of the 1920s–1940s. In fact, it would take theatrical innovations from the 1950s–70s, but the interdisciplinary practices of the 1960s in particular, to find a form for his ‘total physiological revolution’ (1947). As Flaszen writes:

A theatre conceived by Artaud is an appropriate point of departure for discussing the actual nature of the theatre laboratory: *a laboratory that builds a human being liberated from automatisms, using the tools of the theatre and starting off from the body alone.*

One might argue Artaud is an extremist. That is true. (2010: 100)

Jannarone positions Brook’s application/betrayal of Artaud as a justification for reversing Artaudian politics (i.e. from ‘right’ to ‘left’). However, Brook’s betrayal is also an artistic compromise. Earlier scholarly accounts have dealt with the impact of Artaud’s radical politics (see Schumacher, 1989; Kershaw, 1999; Sheer, 2004), while Jannarone is astute in exposing the chasm between Artaud’s own practices and his influence on others. The alleged fascism in his writing and its influence on 1960s ‘progressive’ practitioners has a parallel with the influence of Nietzsche on the psychoanalysts, poststructuralists and phenomenologists. These concerns would have been palpable for Brook and Marowitz as the RSC Experimental Group moved towards Artaudian thinking. Their presentation of work to the public under the *ToC* title implied a series of

ideological assumptions, although they had intended a *kinder* cruelty and a more *scientific* Artaud.

Brook and Marowitz's writing about Artaud in practice repeatedly emphasized the *discipline* (rather than the *cruelty*) that this approach demands of the actor. The experimentation that was made possible *in the name of* Artaud by the 1960s laboratory theatres could not have occurred if cruelty had simply meant brutality. The Artaudians apparently fell into a trap characterized by Jannarone as 'disingenuous' (199), especially in relation to the simplistic notion that cruelty implies discipline, strictness or rigour. Yet Marowitz argued: 'In my view, radical theatrical experiments need to be justified, if at all, only when they fail' (1978: 13). This account of the *ToC* experiment implies that laboratory processes might best isolate and fragment artistic works in order to expose knowledge (they are *cruel* to be kind). Marowitz is also on record (in Hunt and Reeves, 1995) stating that he (rather than Brook) was more influenced by Artaud at the time of the *ToC* experiments. Brook has also stated a problem with the title:

[which] was much misunderstood, although the work itself was presented with a quotation from Artaud which established absolutely precisely his extraordinary definition of cruelty as being a form of self-discipline, and therefore cruelty meant cruelty to oneself.
(in Hunt and Reeves, 1995: 75).

Brook goes on to imply that critics missed the masochistic nuances of this work, and became obsessed by the sadistic implications of the title. Jannarone notes that 'a few sentences' – added at the insistence of Artaud's editor to the manuscript of *Theatre and Its Double* (1938) to justify the *ToC* title – have stripped out the real sadism of Artaud's practice. As noted above, this addendum repositions cruelty as 'self-discipline'. If cruelty is "above all lucid, a kind of rigid control and submission to necessity", then all the

implied sadism is suspended in what Jannarone characterizes as ‘existential abstraction’ (2012: 199).

Barba’s notion of the theatre laboratory may help us here: ‘A laboratory is first and foremost a mental place, a workshop inside us’ (Barba in Schino, 2009: 31). Unlike Artaud’s (psychiatrically disturbed) vision, where the cruelty has to be immediately imposed on the universe, the more nuanced applications of Artaud in Grotowski and Brook evoke Barba’s notion of ‘a workshop inside us’. In this way, the theatre laboratory becomes an incubation space for scientific or philosophical reflection upon *practice*. As Schino continues:

In the second half of the twentieth century the theatre laboratory was the place for such paradoxical observation and practice... A theatre laboratory is a theatre that *also* raises theatrical problems not directly related to actual performance... Laboratoriness is thus the work that, in addition to an artistic process, also emphasizes a cognitive process. (2009: 32–3)

This capacity for the theatre laboratory to ‘raise problems not directly related to actual performance’ is something that my own PaR will directly explore, by identifying interdisciplinary areas of inquiry. The word ‘laboratoriness’ is used by Schino ‘to indicate everything that is going on in theatre laboratories, as well as the propensity to create new laboratories recognizing their value and importance’ (Schino, 2009: 24). I would like to draw particular attention to the self-reflexivity that this word implies. In the next section, the theatre laboratory will emerge as a profoundly *reflexive* process where I will investigate these historical issues of experimentation through the contemporary process central to *Endlessness* (2011).

III. ‘Watch us at play’: theatrical experiments

This section will analyze PaR experiments that use theatrical process to interrogate scientific writing. Primarily, I will be interested in how experimental theatre adapts the scientific method into laboratory process, especially its foregrounding of error, mistake and failure. In doing so, I will be drawing upon Brook’s *ToC* experiments and constructing my own ‘scientific research’ through performance. While the ‘thought experiments’ explored during the *Endlessness* process were carefully selected in collaboration with science educators and academic researchers, and the audience feedback demonstrated a strong connection between the practice and the source material, the *theatrical/scientific* problem re-emerges here (especially in Nietzsche extracts below). I have defined this problem as an interdisciplinary tension between *theatrical* performance and *scientific* process, which I have exemplified using the historical example of Brook’s *ToC*. In the PaR material that follows, I will position *Endlessness* as practice in search of a hypothesis, not unlike Pirandello’s six characters and their author. Each practical experiment was a step towards a hypothesis about the *theatrical/scientific* problem, and as such they should be considered in terms of ‘unfinished thinking’ (Borgdorff, 2012: 194). The value of returning to this ‘unfinished thinking’ via digital documentation of practice and the performance script/score (see *Endlessness* script on CD-Rom) has been to make the experiments more fully *thought*.

I begin by exploring the experiments with scientific writing and how each textual extract became performance fragments. To understand how the stimuli was selected, I will consider one of Nietzsche’s more playful ‘thought experiments’:

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of ‘world history’ — yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.

One might invent such a fable and still not have illustrated sufficiently how wretched, how shadowy and flighty, how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature. There have been eternities when it did not exist; and when it is done for again, nothing will have happened. (Nietzsche, 2015 [1873])

This philosophical fantasy created a mood for performance, an atmosphere that we could *inhabit*. It evoked a wider corpus of philosophical (and poetical) writings on human knowledge within vast cosmology. In order to respond to this body of work, we initiated a series of conversations with academic philosophers and historians of science.¹⁶ These conversations led us to a different passage from Nietzsche: ‘How the “Real World” at last Became a Myth: History of an Error’ (1889). In collaboration with university chemists, I found early accounts of atoms, which led me to *On the Nature of Things* by Lucretius (1st Century BC). From our previous work on performance and myth, I returned to Ovid and ‘The Teachings of Pythagoras’ in the *Metamorphosis* (8AD). These classical texts were contrasted with a publication from Matthew Broome: ‘Suffering and the Eternal Recurrence of the Same’ (2005). This article dealt with disturbances of temporality in disorders of the self, such as depression and schizophrenia. It also responded to modern psychiatric discourse in the context of Western philosophy – ‘the neuroscience, psychopathology and philosophy of time’ (Broome, 2005: 187) – which allowed us to consider all four texts in terms of the poetics and philosophies of scientific knowledge. We imagined this stimulating a week of theatrical experimentation to create the same atmosphere as Nietzsche’s ‘clever animals’ inventing knowledge ‘in some remote corner of the universe’.

Some of our experiments failed, but the process itself was instructive.

¹⁶ This group included Matthew Broome (Psychiatry, Warwick/Oxford), Eileen John (Philosophy, Warwick), Peter Sadler (Chemistry, Warwick), Chris Ponting and Kirsten Shepherd-Barr (Oxford).

i. Theatre trying to be scientific (Phase 1)

The first experiments took place August–September 2011 at the Pegasus Theatre, a month before our work-in-progress showing, and they established a series of practical tasks for adapting the four texts into physical action. One protracted exercise used blank postcards as a method for adapting scientific writing into theatrical text as dialogue. These dialogues then created exchanges between scientific periods and isolated rhetorical or poetic refrains from the four texts. One task juxtaposed Ovid’s Pythagoras with Lucretius, by selecting fragments from both texts transcribed to the postcards. These were selected at random to create a dialogue between historical periods. These tasks evolved into a method for creating a structure for performance. Using improvised action based on the fragments (e.g. enacting Lucretius in a fictional dialogue with Pythagoras), they produced units of physical action, for re-iteration of the script/score (see CD-Rom).

This task created a parallel between the Atomism of Lucretius’ poem and the treatment of Pythagorean flux by Ovid. Taken together this juxtaposition between the ‘void’ at the centre of all matter and the fluidity of ‘all things’ produced a starting point for our work. From this philosophical tension we devised a series of fragments and then composed haiku, to try and compress the complexity into a minimalist literary form:

I.

The sum of the dark?

The answer's always zero.

Nothing. Everything.

II.

The body in shades

Casting webs of fixity

Measureless to reach.

III.

Measuring the void.

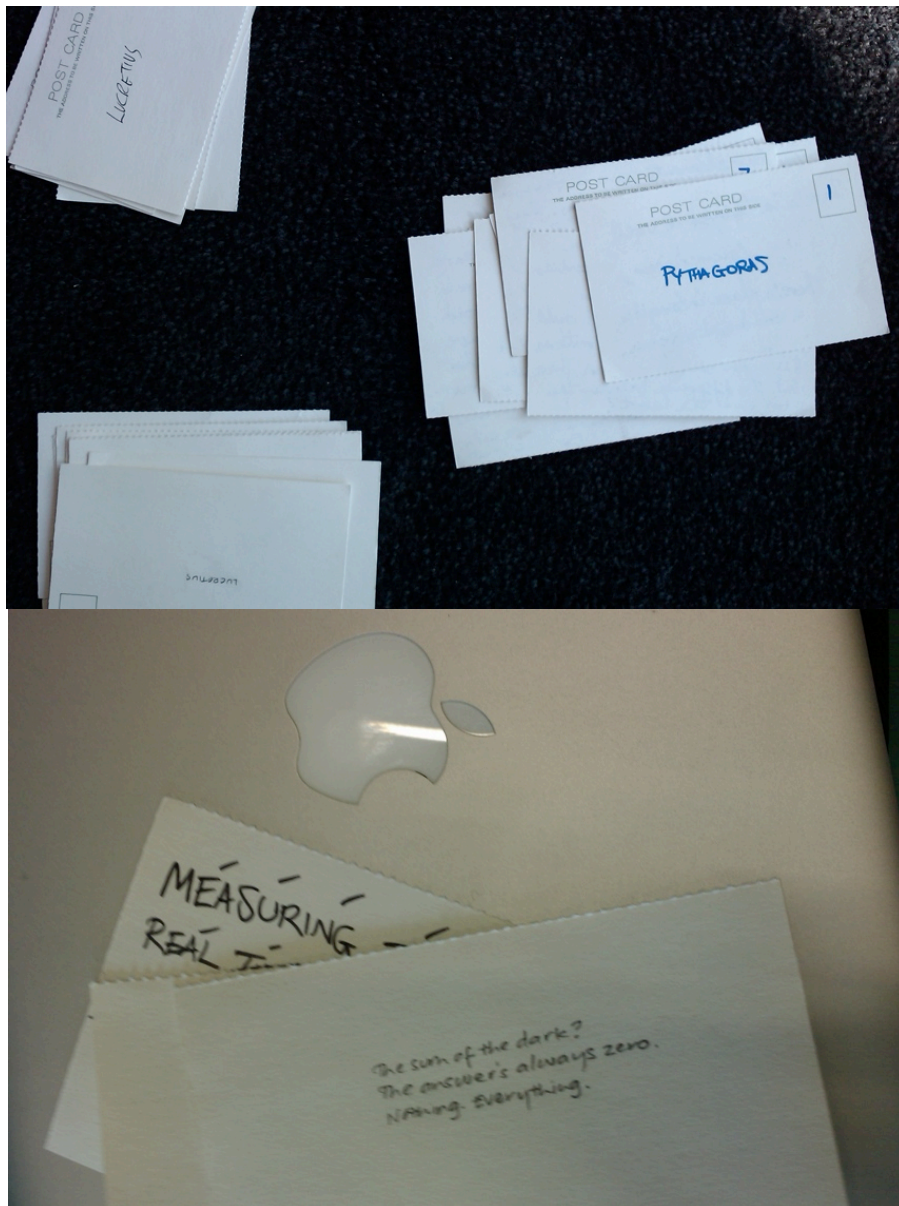
Real spacetime, this spacetime is no spacetime.

I scribe and transcribe.

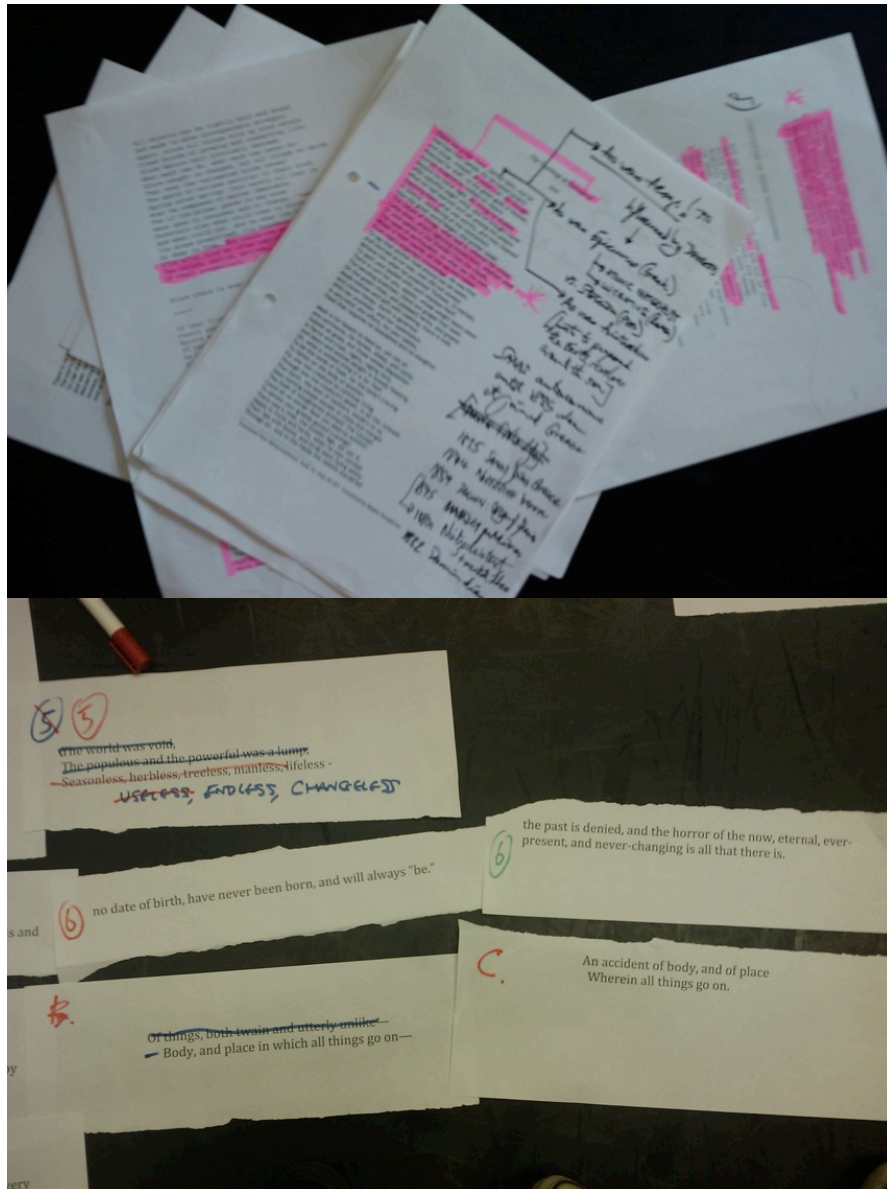
I incorporate these haiku as they capture the theatrical mood of our initial experiments while showing the difficulties we faced in communicating the full complexity of the material sciences. One particular difficulty was making a valid comparison between quantum accounts of the universe and historical scientific writing. While we were specifically interested in the human body in relation to scientific knowledge (i.e. how the embodied mind of the researcher *affects* the research), the critical focus became the human measurement of empty space ('the sum of the dark'). This enabled us to play with dark studio space as a metaphor for a cosmological void in which the protagonist measured cells of 'nothingness' with a lamp.

While the haiku produced a greater clarity in our thought process, the experimental outcome was a 'scientific' piece of theatre, rather than science-theatre itself. Through our search for tangible and playable aspects of the scientific material we had moved far beyond the initial experimental focus. In fact, we were now devising theatre in response to the scientific writing, as opposed to constructing participatory practice that would elucidate the material. It turned out that our creative urge to make theatre was in this context a slippage that unsettled our results. On reflection, there should either have been more participation from the outset of the experiments or no public performance at the end of the process. As with Brook's *ToC*, I had made the mistake that laboratory experiments are theatrically engaging in and of themselves. However, our instinct as trained *theatre*-practitioners was to produce a performance from a script as an appropriate offering to a work-in-progress audience.

The textual fragments (*Figures 2.1 – 2.4*) demonstrate how this problem produced more material than we were able to use. The postcards (*Fig. 2.1*), the haiku (*Fig. 2.2*), the stimuli (*Fig. 2.3*) and the adaptation (*Fig. 2.4*) demonstrate the material traces of the devised work across this first phase of experimentation. Once those initial decisions had been made, the first experimental phase had finished and a production process started to emerge. This was the moment when we moved from ‘scientific’ theatre to experimental performance.



Figures 2.1 & 2.2: Endlessness process (2011)



Figures 2.3 & 2.4: Endlessness process (2011)

ii. Science trying to be theatrical (Phase 2)

We extended the theatrical experiment with scientific writing into a second week of devising at the University of Warwick during September 2011. By this time, a sequence of physical action had been set using the structure of 'History of an Error' (1889), where Nietzsche proceeds through several stages of human error in failing to understand the 'real world'. This developed our work on his 1873 thought experiment (clever animals inventing knowledge) but provided a tangible sequence for physical action. It generated

five stages, as follows: 1) confirmation of work: happy and proud, 2) reward promised: shocked then relieved), 3) work simply a duty: shocked but respectful, 4) purpose unknown: desperation and mania, 5) work useless: abolished. These stages were used by the performer as ways to transmit his ‘findings’ to a higher authority, which resulted in different degrees of radio static (as confirmation of his submission). This strategy represented the philosophical and psychological complexities of gathering research data without knowing the scientific rationale or experimental hypothesis.

By this second phase we developed the script/score (see CD-Rom), and we followed the sequence of physical action with a final monologue composed from all four scientific texts, thus incorporating writing from different periods: 1st Century BC, 8AD, 1889 and 2005. In performance, this monologue proved unsustainable, and the actor struggled to find the appropriate sequence of lines, forcing him to improvise from the fragments themselves. Upon reflection, this monologue’s failure became a valuable experimental outcome of the highly pressurized physical action that preceded it. However, this did cause the theatrical narrative to break down and forced the performer ‘out of role’. Treating the scientific writing as raw material for our performance text had proven impossible, so we adapted the texts into a dramatic interplay between ‘all things’ and ‘a void’ (key ideas in the Lucretius text). One way this was expressed theatrically was to suspend inscribed paper materials from the lighting grid, as word-clouds in a dark void. Within the logic of the piece, the character’s discovery of these overhanging objects generated the stimulus for his stream-of-consciousness monologue:

One. Thing. Ever. One thing. Nothing. One thing from nothing. Nothing from nothing. Nothing from nothing ever yet was born. Nothing returns to naught; but all return at their collapse to primal forms. Nothing is permanent in all the world. All things are fluid; every image forms, wandering through change. There’s in things a void – lifeless, changeless, endless – (2011)

Although our 2011 text was composed from textual fragments from classical antiquity through to contemporary science, this opening section re-works sentences on ‘nothing’ and ‘void’. The effect of this in performance was to show a human mind trying to process generations of philosophical thought (‘nothing from nothing’ vs. ‘nothing returns to naught’). This re-edit of Lucretius, Ovid and Nietzsche produced a vocal tapestry of devised fragments and allowed the protagonist to demonstrate his thought process. This was informed by Nietzsche’s 1889 ‘History of Error’ and his 1873 *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, where ‘clever animals invented knowledge’ in an ‘aimless and arbitrary’ moment of eternity. As the monologue built towards its imperfect conclusion, the protagonist confronted his knowledge falling away as the contradictory thrust of inherited thought overpowered him.



Figures 2.5 & 2.6: *Endlessness performance* (2011)

[See *Endlessness* video at 23m30s on CD-Rom]

The word-clouds (shown in *Figures 2.5 & 2.6*) generated a new vocabulary that the protagonist can use as an additional experimental tool. They emerged as materials found in the void, during the performance, having realised that there was a full constellation of (previously unseen) materials above his head (see *Figure 2.5*). The materials were made out of paper, and contained prescribed words, such as ‘no’ or ‘none’ (see *Figure 2.6*). This suspended ‘dark matter’, as it were, allowed the protagonist to play with each of the word-clouds and create an alternative to his only other spoken utterance in the piece (i.e. ‘nothing’ instead of ‘zero’). This had been informed by additional scientific writing, including John D. Barrow’s *A Book of Nothing* (2001), which covers ‘nothingology’, ‘the origin of zero’, ‘darkness in the ether’ and ‘empty universes’. At one point, Barrow writes that: ‘in modern times, it is the artist who continues to explore the paradoxes of Nothing in ways that are calculated to shock, surprise or amuse’ (5).

In our attempts to render the nothingness of void as *theatrical*, we had introduced material objects for the actor to play with, disrupting our initial experimental aims and process. These material objects became ‘epistemic things’ (cf. Borgdorff, 2012: 193) as a result of our re-iterative experimental process. While they had initially functioned as theatrical props, they soon emerged as laboratory equipment. For example, the lamp ceased to be a light source and became a research tool. Using the lamp in this way altered its technical function and disrupted its materiality to produce different meanings for the audience. In reaching for new objects to disrupt our experiments, we found an experimental way of working with existing materials. Our instinct to make sense for an audience had forced our work out from the ‘private laboratory’ of the studio (Chaikin, 1972: 104) into the public laboratory of the theatre (cf. Read, 2008: 2).

iii. Neither science nor theatre (Phase 3)

During this process we experienced a shift from performing experiments ('scientific theatre') to experimental performance ('theatrical science'). The *Endlessness* protagonist attempted to measure the void with intense physical precision, using his body to observe cells of light in the darkness. Each time he used the lamp to create a new section of the void, he explored different measurements with his physical dexterity. For example, his used his feet and fingers on the first inspection, then his heel and palms on the second. At the third and fourth act of measurement, he could be observed using his arms and legs in a variety of capacities. At the fifth, he allowed his entire frame to enter the void and inhabit the space completely. These early experiments on size, dimension, proportion, magnitude, mass, bulk, volume, capacity, expanse, quantity, depth and range appeared to show *scientific* measurement through *theatrical* means.

Ultimately, this physical action prompted a useful discussion between scientists and artists at the work-in-progress event in October 2011. However, the 'pure' experiments, using only the body to measure void, had been lost in favour of public performance. Aesthetic values had taken over, and our new objective became to share a constructed experience with an audience, rather than produce experimental data through performance. In hindsight, I would not have shaped these results into a theatrical narrative; I would rather have simply staged these experiments with the audience. That could have enabled a more open discussion between the scientists and the artists that would have moved us beyond the *theatrical/scientific* problem, rather than perpetuating it.

As it turned out, the audience (see *Figure 2.7*) seemed unperturbed by the experimental approach we had taken and engaged in open discussion after the performance. For example, paradox in the performance was emphasized by an audience member: '*one distinctive thing about doing science is that actually you often don't have a sensation of reporting a finding to a greater authority and then getting the feedback... just wondering whether you*

*explored other ways of having the character check the findings or try to verify?*¹⁷ At the beginning of the process, we hoped that the physical action of measuring the void and reporting the findings might have evoked this anticlimactic experience, often reported by scientists (e.g. *The Life Scientific*, BBC Radio 4). Another audience member asked: *‘was the intention partly to highlight the big leap that language represents? If so, it worked; the gap between the silent body and the speaking voice was striking’*. This question recalls our earlier work on textual fragments and scientific writing. For example, we wanted to demonstrate the leap from observation of phenomena to the articulation of *affect* in scientific literature.

Another audience member focused on the material objects on stage and their role in the construction of narrative: *‘like the pieces of paper, where the actor put them together like a puzzle. Will you use this to question life and the answer to the meaning in life (by pieces of life together)?’* This response responded to the specific performance conditions where material objects (pieces of paper) stood in for philosophical ideas (e.g. Nietzsche, 1889) and scientific publications (e.g. Broome, 2005). Furthermore, the audience’s presence during our ‘experimental’ performance, in contrast to their absence when we performed our initial experiments, was highly significant, because I had neglected to include the audience in the experimental design of the performance process. This was an unfortunate omission. When they came to watch our work, the work had changed.



Figure 2.7: *Endlessness audience* (2011)

¹⁷ This audience feedback (and below) was gathered as written feedback on 1 October 2011.

iv. 'Postdramatic' performance (Overview)

I would like to suggest that these PaR experiments constitute a form of 'postdramatic' theatre (cf. Lehmann, 1999), where anti-theatrical forms of performance have replaced traditional representational practices in the theatre. To some extent, this shift can be understood within the 'performative turn' in theatre studies (see Davis, 2008), but I would also position it alongside the 'science studies' movement (see Latour, 1999). My own initial reading in the quantum sciences (e.g. Barad, 2007) shows that the scientific observation *affects* phenomena in complex ways. This signals a form of experimentalism that is open to the event of performance, acknowledging the role of bodies and environments within 'epistemic cultures' (see Knorr Cetina, 1999). I would like to draw a parallel between the way in which audiences *affect* performance, and the way scientists change data through experimental interaction. Not only are laboratories spaces for 'the construction of scientific facts' (Latour and Woolgar, 1979), but also scientists have a habit of staging their experimentation as performance (Crease, 1993). As Knorr Cetina would have it: 'Laboratories *recast* objects of investigation by inserting them into new temporal and territorial regimes' (1999: 43). I will deal with the implications of this in the final section of this chapter. However, within the PaR analysis, I aim to focus on the significance of human embodiment, and specifically bodily emotions, within scientific experimentation. I will position the *Endlessness* experiments as an example of 'postdramatic' performance that uses the *theatrical/scientific* problem as example of Shepherd-Barr's 'eclecticism of postmodernism' (2006: 214).

In the *Endlessness* examples above a dramaturgy of elimination (distilling, cutting and erasing) was used to shape the performance. In the first example, the postcards were a means of distilling the core content from scientific writing (Lucretius and Nietzsche). As co-devisors we privileged theatrical or aesthetic instincts over historical or philosophical concerns, meaning that certain refrains were selected for their

form/content, while entire other sections were disregarded. The development of an atmosphere *for performance* drove the selection of material, rather than producing the conditions *for experimentation*. This process of ‘elimination’ facilitated radical textual adaptation with stylistic and tonal criteria (cf. Brook’s 1962 *King Lear*). The use of ‘elimination’ in this way recalls 1960s experimentalism that subsequently ushered in a postmodern turn in theatre practice (e.g. Robert Lepage, Tadeusz Kantor, Heiner Muller and Robert Wilson). In this ‘postdramatic’ register, cutting and collage were as much part of the creative process as making and devising, and experimentation became *theatrical*.

In Phase 3, as described above, the stylized approach to measurement and data suggests that *Endlessness* may have adopted too much of a *scientific* register. This may have influenced another audience member to write that the piece has produced the feeling of ‘powerlessness’ in her body. While it had been a feature of the process to eliminate sentiment where possible, some of the audience wanted *more* emotion, *more* awe, *more* wonder. Some comments suggest it would be ‘more like real science’ if the piece conveyed a wider emotional register for the scientific process. Our focus had been on conveying the physical struggle of experiments themselves. Furthermore, the elimination of all light sources – except the portable lamp – enabled the performer to make the void tangible and to capture the *labour* of measurement. This particular aspect of the material environment created ‘void’ (i.e. the actor’s body and the lamp alone together created a sense of endless dark space), while the audience (in their feedback) appeared to become aware of a bound ‘infinity’ within the studio. In achieving that, this aspect of the experiment enabled us to play with scale, and make certain adjustments to the physical conditions surrounding the imaginative ‘void’ (i.e. curved audience seating extending into the distance, total blackout prior to the performance, no latecomers policy decision, the use of radio static and voice-over, using the lamp rather than standard theatrical lighting).

Some final observations on language and style in *Endlessness* conclude this section. The initial experiments, but not the performance event, required the elimination of all vocabulary except 'zero', 'nothing', 'none' and 'never'. The protagonist's stream-of-consciousness monologue began to feel relentless in performance, blurring boundaries between rehearsed action and spontaneous improvisation. My view is that this emerged from the performer's physical experience of enacting such a 'cruel' piece of theatre, which systematically denied the traditional expressiveness of the actor (we avoided characterization or spoken dialogue). Although there were markers (e.g. repeated phrases on 'nothing' and 'void') in the script, set by technical cues, the performer's lapse in delivery can be viewed experimentally. This moment breakdown of characterized the 'postdramatic' style of the performance, and contributed a scientific outcome.

Shepherd-Barr's *Science on Stage: From Doctor Faustus to Copenhagen* (2006) describes a new form of performing science: '[where] rather than developing a character, mentally fleshing out the character's story and motives as most actors in traditional theater are trained to do, the actor in the alternative science play is primarily a vessel for ideas' (212). The 'alternative science play' is, for Shepherd-Barr, a new convention where: 'a great deal more emphasis is placed on the body in what is intensely physical theater' (212).

Endlessness can be seen as an 'alterative science play' under these criteria, and it also responds to Shepherd-Barr's description of such works as 'postdramatic', in that 'they also stretch traditional notions of time and space in the theater' (214). In 'providing a series of extended moments', *Endlessness* can be characterized within what Shepherd-Barr describes as an 'eclecticism of postmodernism' because: 'recent science plays defy C.P. Snow's pessimistic forecast of a widening rift between the two cultures and instead encourage each culture to learn about the other through the interactive and persistently experimental medium of performance' (218). Within this paradigm, the performer's lapse

in *Endlessness* (his monologue falling apart at the seams), exemplifies theatre's inability to contain the full complexity of experimentation.

I would consider this a scientific outcome, as it was not unexpected. All of the theatrical elements were in place to repeat the same physical action (scripting the monologue, choreographing the movement, setting the audio, plotting the lighting, rehearsing the sequence etc.). However, in performance, something fell apart as a result of the experimental conditions. Rather than viewing this outright as a representational failure, which shattered traditional values of character and plot, the *Endlessness* failure occurred within the context of a *theatrical/scientific* process. I can only conclude that the actor's body had been *affected* by the repeated attempts to make the void tangible by measuring it with his body, where the character's failure became his own in performance. Although the actor had accomplished this sequence of actions with the monologue in perfect synchronicity with the recorded audio (during rehearsal), when the public experiment took place, the monologue overflowed and exceeded itself. This rupture in the *artifice* of theatre became a revelation in the *event* of performance.

I make this distinction to show that the *theatrical/scientific* problem can only manifest itself through the excessive nature of performance, rather than within controlled mechanisms of theatrical production. In the *event* of performance, the *artifice* gave way to experimentation in unpredictable ways. If the monologue had been performed exactly as written, its status within an experimental performance could be called to account. Instead, the actor's lapse saved the performance from its own theatricality, and enabled 'laboratorial' phenomena to emerge. As a result, we were able to sit in front of the audience as three collaborators (see *Figure 2.7*) having simply presented a *theatrical/scientific* problem that constituted a 'postdramatic' experiment in performance studies.

IV. ‘Kindly watch us at play’: performance experiments

In this final section I will consider the *reflexivity* at the core of laboratory process.

Knorr Cetina insists that: ‘we need to conceive of laboratories as processes [and] we have to expect different *types* of laboratory processes in different areas, resulting from cumulative processes of differentiation’ (1999: 45). Knorr Cetina emphasizes the *diversity* of laboratories in various ‘epistemic cultures’ globally, making a particular comparison between biomedical research and high-energy physics. From her argument, I would like to draw the socially situated nature of laboratories – within ‘the knowledge machineries of contemporary sciences’ – and their capacity to ‘display the smear of technical, social, symbolic dimensions of intricate expert systems’ (3). Ultimately, she argues that this ‘*disunifies* the sciences’ (3) and extends the ‘current transmutation of modernity into new institutional forms’ (5).

Knorr Cetina begins her analysis of experimental cultures in non-scientific laboratories: ‘the psychoanalyst’s couch, the medieval cathedral, and the war game’ (33).

By contrast, Read notes that:

The root of the word ‘laboratory’, a word first used in English in 1608 around the time that Shakespeare was contemplating *The Tempest*, the ‘labour of oratory’, forcing things to speak, is a reminder of the violence inherent to all demonstrations of discoveries. (2013: 22)

I will consider the implications of rendering performance as *scientific* through laboratory processes, and compare this with ‘violence of demonstration’ in science-theatre practices. Taken together, the historical materials (*ToC*) and the PaR experiments (*Endlessness*) convey a problem shared between the arts and the sciences in relation to observation. Each case study reveals an experimental problem, when observation is expanded too widely or inaccurately defined. Brook and Marowitz’s problem was how to apply Artaud without betraying him. This problem was exposed in the act of performance, when their

highly subsidized ‘scientific research’ failed to deliver a show, so that Genet’s play seemed unstageable at that time. The fact that this period of experimentation directly informed the success of *Marat/Sade* (1965) and Brook’s subsequent RSC productions (e.g. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 1970) provides a useful model for understanding how values and practices emerge from ‘laboratory’ theatres. For example, *Endlessness* also failed to deliver a ‘show’, but directly informed our choices for *Fail Better Fragments* and some elements of *Beckett and Brain Science* (both 2012). While there is always a risk in showing theatre experiments too early, it is the open observation of these phenomena that constitute the laboratory status of these projects. The co-investigators had to be prepared to un-learn their theatrical instincts to ‘make a show’ in order for *transdisciplinary* performances to emerge through the interdisciplinary collaboration.

Helen Nicholson argues in *Theatre, Education and Performance* (2011) that ‘new epistemologies are developing as a result of collaborations between theatre-makers and scientists that redefine the relationship between theatre, performance, public engagement and experiential learning’ (177). She also notes that:

Theatre not only has the potential to dramatize bioethical debates, but that collaboration enables scientists and artists to challenge outdated perceptions that the arts are intuitive, emotional and empathetic whereas sciences are, in Tim Ingold’s words, built on ‘the sovereign perspective of abstract reason’ and the ‘cold logic’ of scientific judgment [2000: 25], a view that became entrenched in twentieth-century educational discourse. (2011: 177)

Nicholson is particularly attuned to the relationship between scientific knowledge and ‘structures of power’, and her analysis develops this argument towards a question: ‘how might the relationship between science and theatre education be reconceptualised for the twenty-first century?’ (182). My own response to this question has been outlined in the

PaR accounts above, but I will now draw these ideas together by thinking about the *reflexivity* of experiments in practice.

In positioning reflexivity as a feature of PaR experimentation, I am also acknowledging its relationship to scientific research. Latour and Woolgar's notion of reflexivity in relation to 'the construction of scientific facts' is most relevant here, particularly their nuanced account of its function: 'reflexivity is thus a way of reminding the reader that *all* texts are stories. This applies as much to the facts of our scientists as to the fictions "through which" we display their work' (1979: 284). Latour and Woolgar explain what reflexivity does, but not how it is defined. The reflexive, in grammar, is a linguistic state of 'referring back to the subject of a clause' (*OED*, 1998: 1154). From this status of 'language about language', I would like to consider 'practice about practice' as a new category for my own PaR¹⁸. This can also be related back to Brook's experiments, which were often meta-theatrical in nature. This conception of laboratory process as *reflexive* turns experiment back on itself to create practice-about-practice. For example, the *Endlessness* performance functioned as a demonstration of the earlier experiments and re-iterated their material conditions. This kind of closed experimentation in a private laboratory (briefly open to the public) is something that I believe characterized Brook's *ToC* process also. This differs from the open experimentation that I will discuss in next chapter, where Laban's movement praxis and Littlewood's *Fun Palace* imagine a public laboratory without a bound timescale.

For Nicholson, these issues relate to the 'social conditions in which knowledge is produced, translated, transformed and disseminated' (2011: 195), and she goes on to summarize the problem historically: 'one of the arguments [in this chapter] is predicated on challenging the two culture divide that is a legacy of the Enlightenment separation

¹⁸ This is especially true of *Fail Better Fragments* (2012) in performance, but a notable aspect of both *Endlessness* (2011) and *Discords* (2010) during the respective devising processes.

between reason and emotion, value and aesthetics' (195). In addressing my own position as practitioner within an interdisciplinary research process, I would like to suggest that C.P. Snow's 'two cultures' problem did not heavily feature in our collaborations, as the scientists had been selected because of their interest in the cultural and pedagogic benefits of their research. As Nicholson points out: 'science, as well as the arts, is inspired by emotion and passion, shaped by intuition, and finds expression in narrative and aesthetic forms' (196). It is worth returning to Latour and Woolgar briefly here ('*all texts are stories*') where reflexivity has a narrative function as well as an epistemological value. It was an important feature of *Endlessness*, as with *Discords*, that narrative emerged from the adaptation of texts, rather than the interpretation of texts. This emphasized our agency as creative artists (making performance), rather than interpretative artists (staging drama). I would like to develop these ideas comparing them with Crease's *The Play of Nature: Experimentation as Performance* (1993).

Crease imagines scientific experimentation as a theatrical performance, and the scientific laboratory as: 'constructed for the purpose of facilitating the performance and witnessing of a specific kind of action therein' (104). This 'theatron' contains 'a process that involves bringing something materially into being... the laboratory itself is a space of action' (106). He continues: 'laboratories themselves are socially negotiated outcomes of the reconstructions of problematic situations' and 'experimenters are in the role of producer-directors' (106). Although Crease falls short of imagining his experimenters as performers in their own right, he takes pains to position the performance as the experiment itself. This understanding of reflexivity is important for my analysis, and its emphasis on the sociology of laboratory structures recalls Latour and Woolgar. However, Crease insists that there is an 'artistry of experimentation' which he relates to Michael Polanyi's 'tacit knowledge', Evelyn Fox Keller's 'dynamic objectivity' and Barbara

McClintock's 'feeling for the organism' (108). Furthermore, Crease emphasizes the materiality of experimentation thus:

Like artists, experimenters are restricted by the limits of their equipment and materials, they push these limits and must wait and see what works... An artistic performance begins with a performative play-space that is not infinite... A performer allows such things to function as organic parts of the performance as event... apparently inessential details spelled the difference between success and failure. (110)

I will consider 1960s theatre laboratories, specifically Brook's *ToC*, in light of Crease's discussion. Brook's description of the *ToC* as 'scientific research' is useful to place alongside his judgment on the application of Artaud as betrayal (1990: 60). Both remarks imply that Brook's experiments failed (in their immediate objectives) yet produced a radical sense of renewal within the companies themselves. Furthermore, their historical significance resides in their capacity to train a new ensemble and produce theatrical innovations that led to his productions of *Marat/Sade* (1965), *MSND* (1970) and, eventually, his CIRT/CICT experiments in Paris. The experiments failed to deliver his intended full production of Genet's *The Screens* (aborted in 1964), but they began the process of constructing a new theatrical language that can be traced even to recent CICT productions such as *The Valley of Astonishment* (2014).

Likewise, the experiments of the Living and Open Theatres also failed to 'apply Artaud' to the politics of the 1960s New York avant-garde. As Chaikin wrote retrospectively: 'All prepared systems fail. They fail when they are applied... Process is dynamic: it's the evolution that takes place during work. Systems are recorded as ground plans, not to be followed any more than rules of courtship can be followed' (1972: 21). Chaikin wrote that: 'very early in our meetings, even before we started calling ourselves

the Open Theater, we were a formless group. The initial form came about as a result of the people who originally made up that group' (54). He continues,

Julian Beck said that an actor has to be like Columbus: he has to go out and discover something, and come back and report on what he discovers. Voyages have to be taken, but there has to be a place to come back to, and this place has to be different from the established theater. It is not likely to be a business place. (54)

Were it not for the final sentence, we might imagine such a place as a university or a laboratory. However, as both types of environments are run as businesses in the contemporary moment, I would like to re-imagine Chaikin's place of return as a 'theatre laboratory', which is formed of people, not physical structures or financial systems. In some ways, this corresponds to Crease's thesis, where there is: 'relatedness between the act and those witnessing it... from an observed co-working of elements' (112). Chaikin imagined in 1965 that 'one of the good things is that we're willing to fail; it helps us go beyond the safe limits and become adventurers (56). By contrast, Crease concludes that 'the artistry of experimentation, like that of the theatre, is often accompanied by a feeling of joy and celebration' (120). For Chaikin, the joy is to: 'experiment with what the *teacher* doesn't know. But working with the "don't knows" is perhaps more important than teaching the "knows"' (57).

Within this logic of performative experimentation is the valorization of both risk and failure. While these particular topics have been extensively covered elsewhere (see Ridout, 2006; Bailes, 2011; O'Gorman and Werry, 2012), they are worth re-emphasizing here in relation to experimental histories of performance. Within interdisciplinary collaborations, such as the 'science theatre' experiments of this chapter, there is a *necessary* risk of failure. This is especially apparent in the willful abandonment of closed expertise in favour of an open experimentalism. As the collaborators, and especially the

performers themselves, are particularly vulnerable in these conditions, it should be noted that each process requires its own pedagogy for participation. Historical ‘pedagogic’ strategies for experimentation can be found in Chaikin’s *Presence of the Actor* (1972), Barker’s *Theatre Games* (1977) and Marowitz’s *Notes on the ToC* (1988 [1965]). These texts document ‘laboratory’ processes with a focus on participation. While this aspect of experimental process will be explored further in Chapter 3, it should be noted that any laboratory process must be carefully monitored by those responsible. Chaikin discussed this implied vulnerability as follows: ‘when the Open Theater started we were only a private laboratory. We did performances, occasionally, but basically we were a laboratory performing unfinished work’ (1972: 104).

In this chapter, I have addressed the *ToC* experiments and my own PaR in order to re-examine ‘theatre laboratories’ and scientific performance. I have shown that these laboratories were closed for private experimentation, and that the interdisciplinary *theatrical/scientific* problem has been a feature of each process. The need for artists *and* scientists to experiment, sometimes in collaboration with each other, has been a defining feature of this work and will inform the next chapter on making those processes public. I will explore the idea that experiments can become open-ended participatory events, as opposed to closed disciplinary mechanisms. It is through such a re-conceptualization of laboratory process that arts-based methodologies such as PaR can blur distinctions between ‘epistemic things’ and ‘technical objects’ (Borgdorff 2012: 190). In the *reflexivity* of practice-about-practice there is an important distinction between the ‘things we *want to know*’ (epistemic things) and [...] objects *through which we know* (technical objects)’ (190). The next chapter will extend the epistemic and the technical into the public laboratories of Littlewood and Price’s imagined *Fun Palace* (1960s) and *Fail Better Fragments* (2012).

Chapter 3

We shall know that to dance is also to think.

(Littlewood: 1968)¹⁹

I. *Science playgrounds: on ‘evolving’ Laban*

This chapter adapts the historiographical PaR model from the previous chapters, but extends the argument to the *play/experiment* problem. From the organic machinery of *Play/Discords* to the scientific theatre of *ToC/Endlessness*, I would now like to consider the ludic experimentation of *Fun Palace/Fail Better Fragments* via 1960s performance cultures and their relationship to contemporary movement praxis. By foregrounding human movement in this way, especially Laban’s eight ‘efforts’ (Press, Punch, Glide, Dab, Flick, Wring, Slash, Float), I will interrogate how performance practices can inform critical pedagogies for participation.²⁰ In contrast with earlier chapters, this work will move towards a *trans*-disciplinary approach (practice producing knowledge *across/beyond* disciplines) as opposed to the earlier examples of *multi-/inter*-disciplinarity through performance. However, the chapter follows the same structure by extending my analysis from histories of practice into contemporary PaR, which imagines a participatory future for performance.

Littlewood herself, as a theatre practitioner shaped directly by Laban’s work, imagined a performance culture in which: ‘the theatre will become a university of the streets and people who start to play this game... without knowing where they’re going, not particularly knowing what the objective is, [and] find different forms in different places’ (BFIB1064). Elaborating on this, in a 1968 interview, she stated: ‘I think education will go on to the streets – will need to – you can connect street corners and

¹⁹ Joan Littlewood interview (1968, 21 min) accompanying *Everyone’s an Actor Shakespeare Said* (BFIB1064)

²⁰ By ‘critical pedagogies of participation’ I am referring to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1968) and drawing upon earlier educationalists such as John Dewey and David Kolb.

literally... people might stop being self-conscious and start to really dance... we shall know that to dance is also to think' (BFIB1064). These spoken thoughts demonstrate her visionary and democratic idealism for a post-1960s theatre, which was only partially achieved within her lifetime. I will position Littlewood's visionary thinking in relation to Laban's general movement praxis (via Lisa Ullmann and Jean Newlove) and show how they found form in indeterminate structures such as Cedric Price's *Fun Palace* and Littlewood's *Learn to Play* projects.

I will begin by introducing Littlewood's use of Laban within her own practice. The constant reference to Laban in her work is positioned by Robert Leach in the following terms: 'her 'style' was rooted in 1930s agit-prop, experiments with *commedia dell'arte*, German Expressionism and profound work with the ideas of Stanislavski and Laban. Consequently, it had all the hallmarks of the hybrid' (2006: 186). Leach places heavy emphasis on Littlewood's practice as having been drawn from both Stanislavski and Laban simultaneously. Earlier in his study he argues that: 'Littlewood and MacColl were the first in Britain to attempt seriously and consistently to apply Stanislavski's system to their work' (92). The opportunity to combine this system with Laban's came through the body, and focused on movement, as centrally important to the acting process. Leach reminds us that: 'it is the emphasis on what precedes action which unites Stanislavski and Laban' (93). For example, drawing upon archival materials held at the University of Texas at Austin, he shows that a typical rehearsal week for 'the theatre workshop actor' would include multiple movement calls. In one such example, 'a timetable given to actors for a week in 1948' (123–4), the record shows six rehearsals calls with Jean Newlove specifically, and four additional general movement calls, on top of the voice calls and scene work across six days. This regular focus on movement would have been unusual for British theatre companies at this time (in contrast to the voice/text work of Devine and Brook discussed in earlier chapters). Within these

movement sessions, the practitioners were reworking Laban's 'efforts' for the specific needs of Littlewood's company:

Jean Newlove had the actors rehearsing with closed eyes. What were the movements? Not a light as a dab nor as heavy as a thrust; consequently she invented the 'dab-thrust'. Only when the physical actions were telling the truth did the actors begin to consider the scripted lines.

(Leach, 2006: 126)

This evolution of Laban's system of eight 'efforts' (by splicing two together) demonstrates that this is an open system, malleable in practice. In order to elucidate this point, it is necessary to reference a table (below) that 'demonstrates the incredible subtlety that this analysis can achieve' (McCaw, 2011: 199).

Strong Efforts	
FREE FLOW	BOUND FLOW
Punching (direct, strong, quick)	Fighting against Weight, Space and Time
Pressing (direct, strong, sustained)	Fighting with Weight and Space, Indulging in Time
Slashing (flexible, strong, quick)	Fighting with Weight and Time, Indulging in Space
Wringing (flexible, strong, sustained)	Fighting with Weight, Indulging in Space and Time
Light Efforts	
FREE FLOW	BOUND FLOW
Dabbing (direct, light, quick)	Fighting with Space and Time, Indulging in Weight
Gliding (direct, light, sustained)	Fighting with Space, Indulging in Weight and Time
Flicking (flexible, light, quick)	Fighting with Time, Indulging in Weight and Space
Floating (flexible, light, sustained)	Indulging in Weight, Time and Space

Table 3.1: 'actions in Effort' (McCaw, 2011: 200-1)

McCaw's table shows how this vocabulary of movement can function as a system, and Leach's account of Newlove's 'dab-thrust' [the 'Punch' is sometimes called a 'Thrust'] reveals its potential for practical application and future evolution. In the Theatre Workshop context, Leach makes a clear distinction between mime and 'the practical application of Laban's dynamic system' (126). This distinction is also important for this chapter, as a particular focus will be the impact of Laban on contemporary research methods. Laban recommended his methods 'for all the manifold purposes in which mastery of movement might play a practical role: education, industry, recreation and, as I think, science' (Ullmann, 1984: 6). This is a statement that starts to introduce the transdisciplinary application of Laban's methods, which I want to argue is evident in Littlewood's *Fun Palace* and our own *Fail Better Fragments*. By focusing on movement in terms of FLOW, SPACE, TIME and WEIGHT, I want to explore how we were able to blur distinctions between performers and participants in order to create a series of open performance experiments. This marked a change in our practice, from the restricted structures of Beckett and Brook to the movement systems of Laban and Littlewood.

As will be shown below, the evolution of theatrical systems is something under investigation in the *Fail Better Fragments* material, where Laban's 'efforts' intermingled with earlier Artaudian and Beckettian experiments. Fundamentally, the free use of Laban's 'efforts', as advocated by Newlove at Theatre Workshop, emerges as an evolutionary step in performance practice. It has proven to be an accessible system for movement with both professional artists and public participants, as it has the potential to open up a transdisciplinary dialogue across the subject areas. It also allows movement to be free and *fun*, an aspect of Laban that Littlewood advocated. Furthermore, the thinking on 'stillness and stir' (Laban in Ullmann, 1984: 68) allows *non-movement-in-movement* to be a valid form of participation. We shall see that Littlewood imagined rest and recuperation an acceptable mode of engagement within the *Fun Palace*. However, the structure was

also designed by Price to include a ‘science playground’, which would contain forms of human movement that promote scientific learning through play.

II. ‘A university of the streets’: Littlewood’s laboratory

The practices of Laban and Littlewood have produced knowledge through ludic action. In doing so, they trouble binaries between arts/sciences, work/play and public/private. Laban’s scientific movement analysis has since informed medical and industrial practices (see McCaw, 2011) and Price’s design for the *Fun Palace* would have created a ‘university of the streets’ for Littlewood to devise hybrid performances for London. An extended historical case study follows, in order to explore the value of this process (c.1961–68) for an improved understanding of Laban’s influence on Littlewood’s vision. I will begin with her own words, drawing from her infamous *Joan’s Book* (‘as *she* tells it’), which comprises 762 pages, even before its hefty Appendices (one of which focuses entirely on Laban). Regarding the Fun Palace, Littlewood begins her account with a physical location, the Lea Valley, and a collaborative relationship:

1961 was the year I met Cedric Price, the young architect with the keen mind and an interest in accommodating change. When I’d blown off steam about the current vogue for quaint old theatres, he hadn’t said much, but he had gone away and designed the ‘Fun Palace’. The first time I saw the plans was when I dropped in on him at his office... The drawing was almost inexplicable. I could make out filigree towers, varied areas at different levels, there were galleries, gantries and escalators – it looked airborne. (1994: 701)

However, by this point the geography had already shifted, as Littlewood states that ‘I’d found the ideal site for the Palace, Glengall, on the Isle of Dogs... land, by a tidal river – and that river the Sweet Thames’ (702). By 1963, two sites were being considered, the Lea Valley and the Isle of Dogs, and Price’s involvement created interest from the design

communities and journalists of the time. Both Littlewood and Price were summoned before ‘top-level London County Council officials and questioned closely’ (703), and while this resulted in a rejection of the Isle of Dogs proposal, they showed a willingness to assist in finding an alternative site. However, ‘the possibility of finding riverside land of the area required, in that part of London, seems to be remote and the cost would be exorbitant’, Littlewood reports before concluding, ‘so goodbye to the perfect site. We would never find such another.’ (703).

Intriguingly, Littlewood claimed that they ‘were gaining support among the scientists: Professor Rotblat, who had helped us with *Uranium 235*, was for us; so was Lord Ritchie Calder. Dr Gordon Pask of Systems Research joined forces with us’ (703). The *Fun Palace* would offer an opportunity for artists and scientists to engage in research through performances, debates and experiments. As the previous chapter demonstrated, this precarious relationship can produce quasi-scientific performances that fail to open up experimentation to a wider public. Nonetheless, in abandoning theatre for a more inclusive cultural practice, Littlewood had engaged a series of diverse collaborators. Her new project was, emphatically, ‘not theatre’:

Described as both a ‘university of the streets’ and ‘a laboratory of pleasure’, Littlewood envisaged the Fun Palace as a multi-use space housing a series of short-term, frequently updated activities that could provide an ever-changing focus for people’s leisure time. (Holdsworth, 2011: 211)

An emphasis on participation, democracy and stimulation created new ‘opportunities to experiment with different modes of entertainment and education’ (212). While this still seems radically transdisciplinary even today, the impermanence of the venture can be seen as its major downfall. The emphasis in Price’s designs on ease of movement and maximizing flow through ramps and escalators were important to its structural indeterminacy. In fact, the entire structure was permeable and fluid, even temporary and

demountable. This aspect of the architecture was an important parallel for Littlewood's vision for human movement within the building, and its material contents would trouble the 'two cultures' notion of the arts and sciences. Rather, Littlewood and Price blurred public leisure activity with cybernetic research, prefiguring contemporary phenomena such as haptic screens in public spaces or 'learning machines' built into civic architecture. Littlewood's emphasis on movement, as both *playful* and *experimental*, recalls Laban:

From his first writings, he was concerned by the deadening effect that machine-work in factories was having on workers, and he was keen to bring together the worlds of artistic movement and industrial movement (witness his massive pageant of trades and crafts in Vienna in 1929).
(McCaw, 2011: 333–4)

As McCaw notes, Laban's *Effort* (with F.C. Lawrence, 1947) contradicts F.W. Taylor's highly influential *The Principles of Scientific Management* (2005 [1911]) and: 'happiness is a value for Laban – whether it be in education, recreation or work – this is not simply about celebration, it is also about the best use of human energy' (2011: 334). From this value, there emerges an ethical praxis for human movement, whether that takes place in the theatre, classroom or factory. Across Laban's practice and writings there are a series of pedagogic statements, not dissimilar from Littlewood's own: 'she has an extraordinary power of being able to get out of an individual the one spark they possibly had in them' (Ben Ellis quoted in Leach, 2006: 186). For the remainder of this section, I will continue to describe the Fun Palace project, but will do so with these particular values of physical health and wellbeing in mind. Alongside the 'entertainment', the structure would facilitate public protest or personal reflection, *as well as* 'scientific gadgetry... learning machines... laboratories...' (Holdsworth, 2011: 213).

The re-purposing of a laboratory as 'science playground' (213) would not only have collapsed traditional boundaries between the arts and sciences, but also distinctions

between work and play (or work/life in contemporary parlance). This has the strongest bearing upon Laban where the public and the private coalesce in human movement. In fact, Laban's influence was also apparent as: 'Littlewood regarded fun as an integral part of the learning process and encapsulated this in the interactive tests and games planned for the "science" and "fun" areas' (217-8). Embedded in this approach, is the interwoven idea that 'the mastery of movement' (Laban's term) can both celebrate and shape human energy, which promotes 'happiness as a value' (cf. McCaw, 2011). The influence of these ideas upon Littlewood had already found their expression in the practices of Theatre Workshop, but now they could be shared with a wider public at the *Fun Palace*. As Holdsworth makes clear:

Certainly, the project is interesting for the way it respected pleasure as polymorphous – activated in numerous ways from a bombardment of the senses to the excitement of intellectual curiosity, the application of practical skills, the process of learning, the feel of unfamiliar objects, the active participations in a public or communal event or simply the joy of doing nothing. (2011: 218)

The ludic aspects of this project are worth further consideration, and will be directly addressed in my Conclusion, which draws upon a century of 'play studies' from *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga, 1949) to *A Philosophy of Sport* (Connor, 2011). Indeed, Littlewood's own writing about the Fun Palace, for the *New Scientist* in May 1964, revealed her profound commitment to the pedagogic capacity of play:

In London we are going to create a university of the streets – not a gracious park, but a foretaste of the pleasures of the future. The 'Fun Arcade' will be full of the games that psychologists and electronics engineers now devise for the service of industry, or war. Knowledge will be piped through jukeboxes. (1994: 704)

One extraordinary thing about this historical vision of the future is how familiar it feels to contemporary individuals immersed in the digital cultures of 2015. With recent developments in open-access content (e.g. *Future Learn*) at UK higher education institutions and the numerous digital platforms on which contemporary drama and film is now disseminated (e.g. *NT Live*), the *Fun Palace* designs were almost prophetic. However, one could also argue that the cybernetic revolution of the post-war period has finally found its apogee in the distributed applications of contemporary digital systems. Even so, Littlewood's vision collapsed scientific research and popular entertainment together, in ways that contemporary public engagement programmes have attempted in the early twenty-first century (see Nicholson, 2011); 'in the science playground the wondering scholars of the future – the mystics, the skeptics and sophists – can dispute till dawn' (704). Furthermore, the claim that an: 'acting area will afford the therapy of theatre for everyone... and perhaps find stimulus in social research' (704) may be strongly associated with later traditions of applied theatre, especially the practice of Augusto Boal.²¹ However, Littlewood's space has a different kind of politics to the 'theatre of the oppressed', she states that: 'the essence of the place will be an informality – nothing obligatory – anything goes' (704). The impermanence of Littlewood's structure is its unique asset: 'with informality goes flexibility' (705), and there is an emphasis on pleasure, not politics.

However, the Fun Palace would transcend mere hedonism as a leisure space, by offering 'social observation' (through direct experience or television screens) and the participant is imagined as a performer, 'there will be no rigid division between performers and audience – a generalization of the technique used in Theatre Workshop for many years' (705–6). While Littlewood does not make the connection specifically to

²¹ Of course, Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) responds directly to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) and these practices are roughly simultaneous with the *Fun Palace* project.

Laban, her focus on stimulating human movement through the dynamic use of space, and Newlove's evolution of the 'efforts' at Theatre Workshop, are of central importance here. Not only did Littlewood welcome this movement practice, but also she actively provided the experimental conditions where the craft could develop. Her actors, not unlike those working at the same time with Devine or Brook, become 'co-investigators' in quasi-scientific experimentation. She also imagined reflexive spaces within the Fun Palace as so-called 'zones of quiet' (706) which created a place for observation (a necessary feature of all laboratories, as we have seen). The opportunity to be a still body, amongst moving bodies, was an important factor in the practices of Laban (see Ullmann, 1984), which evokes my own understanding of *non-movement-in-movement*. Stillness amongst activity – or observation within experimentation – not only produces a place for reflection and documentation, but also provided Littlewood with an opportunity for research activity.

It is therefore no surprise that 'the Fun Palace excited a good deal of interest in the scientific world' (706) and Gordon Pask's Cybernetics Committee brought together a group of individuals that would might today be considered a transdisciplinary network. Price's own statement in the *New Scientist*, alongside Littlewood's, asserted that: 'the activities designed for the site should be experimental, the place itself expendable and changeable' (707). The brave assertion that: 'the ephemeral nature of the architecture is a major element of the design, making possible the use of materials and techniques normally excluded from the building industry' (707) seems radical to this day, as public buildings are regularly flexible but rarely temporary, outside of major sporting events²². Another unique feature of Price's design is 'the nature of enclosures' (for there are some), in a structure without doorways, where it is imagined that 'separate units', 'inflatable enclosures' and 'boxes' will be re-positioned by 'a permanent travelling gantry

²² The London 2012 Olympic Games made use of indeterminate structures, ironically in E15.

crane spanning the whole structure' (708). Furthermore, the site itself would provide an experimental site for architecture itself: 'the whole complex provided valuable site-testing conditions for a wide range of materials, equipment and constructional techniques' (708).

By 1964, Price was considering a site at Mill Meads in the Lea Valley and referred the proposal to the newly formed Newham council. Thomas North (council architect) had decided that the site be used for a Teacher Training College, according to Littlewood (712). Price is quoted as stating that: 'pilot schemes, parked temporarily on any available land, will be of great value as outlets for districts which lack modern entertainment and educational amenities. Pilots will also provide some specialized research for the main scheme' (713). At this stage of the project's near collapse, it was important that any temporary space would have a research function, and Littlewood allegedly 'roamed far and wide, a land-hungry settler' (713), assisted by the Thames Harbour-master. It was at this stage in her search that she considered other British cities, from Liverpool to Glasgow, and was persuaded to establish the Fun Palace Trust.²³

I would like to address the tension between 'fun' and 'labour' in Littlewood's descriptions of the *Fun Palace*. At the time, the word 'fun' had caused trouble for the project, but Jennie Lee (politician and wife of Ny Bevan) claimed to like the word, though for all the wrong reasons, according to Littlewood:

I tried explaining the F.P. but the only thing she seemed to like about us was the word 'fun'. She wanted everything to be 'gay and colourful' for the working people. I tried to explain that we'd chosen the word 'fun' almost as a provocation. I didn't stand a chance with my work-play symbiosis (715).

²³ I use this level of detail about architectural space and geographical place, as it will inform the PaR material that follows in the next section. Our own choice to create *Fail Better Fragments* in the Humanities Studio at the University of Warwick (as opposed to a theatre venue in Oxford or London) was an ecological decision to revisit the company's birthplace in order to experiment with an invited audience under subsidised conditions. It had also been the Warwick Theatre Studies studio until 2008.

As noted above, the ludic can also have philosophical validity (see Huizinga, 1949; Caillois, 1961; Sutton-Smith, 2001; Connor, 2011) and, for Gregory Bateson, play had an evolutionary significance as a ‘meta-communicative’ activity (1972). His relative Patrick Bateson characterized ‘playful play’ (with Martin, 2013) as a fun and creative way to learn, although its primary function is ludic. While play and fun are clearly different things, they are often coincidental in forms of human movement that are associated with cultural performance (e.g. dancing, enacting, improvising). Furthermore, Littlewood’s use of the term ‘fun’ as a provocation has a deeply political edge in a post-war landscape when rubble must be cleared in order to establish a playground. In that sense, Huizinga’s ‘homo ludens’ must first survive, before she can play in post-war landscape. Indeed, for Gregory Bateson, there was a complex interrelationship between play and survival, which he evidences by comparing primate interactions (play-fighting monkeys) with human knowledge (why do we play?). ‘Fun’ – for Littlewood as much as Bateson – was part of a hybrid evolutionary process and a complex system of communication.

For example, as part of her struggle to find potential sites for her ‘laboratory of fun’, Littlewood considered a space near the Roundhouse in Camden: ‘two patches of scruffy land, divided by a small road, with a railway bridge overhead’ (716). However, this became one of several aborted proposals. By this time, however, Price’s revised designs included ‘an adult learning area with teaching machines’ and ‘an open-air classroom’ (716). These features reveal the pedagogic discoveries that would be found via the fragmentary experience of play, within an architectural structure that privileged community interaction.²⁴ During this period, Littlewood describes her regular work at Le Centre Culturel in Tunisia [as] ‘our only Fun Palace’ (1994: 736) and, from 1968 onwards, she began focusing on community playgrounds in London. These temporary

²⁴ Ironically, Littlewood recounts how the local residents destroyed any possibility of this pilot project, whom she quotes via the *Hampstead and Highgate Express* (12.02.65): ‘the building would attract the most undesirable type of rowdy and hooligan from other areas’ (718).

playgrounds became the only urban universities she would build during her lifetime. She later reflected that at Mill Meads ‘today in 1993 there is no sign of storm sewage tanks, a pumping station or any other structure so urgently needed twenty-eight years ago’ (739).

I will conclude this section by considering Littlewood’s *Fun Palace* vision as an evolution of Laban’s movement praxis. Writing about Laban’s 1938 *Choreutics*, Valerie Preston-Dunlop argues that it: ‘enables people to look afresh at their own dance and movement heritage, ballet in particular, and see it not as a fixed lexicon of steps and positions but as a “living architecture”, that is, dynamic spatial forms with the potential for change’ (in McCaw, 2011: 176). Furthermore, in the 1938 text Laban wrote: ‘Empty space does not exist. On the contrary, space is a superabundance of simultaneous movements’ (in McCaw, 2011: 182). Littlewood’s ‘laboratory of fun’ was a new venue for this kind of human movement, making performance accessible to all. In her 1968 interview, Littlewood stated that: ‘The theatre will become a university of the streets’, and such as dislocation of knowledge would produce a revolutionary mode of educational performance as public participation. As with Laban before her, the aesthetic heritage is a ‘living architecture’ that can transform the present through human movement. Littlewood had re-imagined this architecture with Price, but eventually found that she could also find it by clearing rubble from the streets of Stratford East. Her final published words on the *Fun Palace* claim that: ‘the design didn’t fit the rule book’ (1994: 741), suggesting that 1960s London was simply not ready for a new model of public architecture. However, her hybrid evolution of Laban’s system for a new generation of theatre-makers has produced a lasting impact through projects such as the 2014 *Fun Palaces* project. This public event has since demonstrated the range and depth of public participation in *both* the arts and the sciences through play (see *Fun Palaces* website, 2015).

In the documentary *Everyone’s an actor, Shakespeare said* (1968), Littlewood is shown working with local boys from Stratford East on an youth theatre project exploring real-

life authority figures. During the film, she is seen devising new drama with the young people, which not only physically removed them from the streets, but also rehearsed alternatives for the intergenerational conflicts in their own lives. While it is tempting to position this work in relation to Boal's 'forum' theatre, Littlewood's insistence on commitment and discipline recalls Laban's applied dance work with factory workers and actors in training. These community regeneration projects with young people emerged from her *Fun Palace* side projects (e.g. *Learn to Play*), where she would encourage the local children to help clear sites strewn with rubbish and rubble. Once a site was cleared, it became a playground. Once it became a playground, it became a space for fun *and* learning. For example:

In case Newham decided to see us off, I took the precaution of filming that site as we found it. We worked and played there, drew and painted, until Michael Holt, a maths teacher from Goldsmith's College, came along. He had new ideas and set the children problems which they solved with coloured cubes, not too big to carry. (1994: 755)

Littlewood had indeed founded 'a university of the streets' through the excavation of debris and without the need for Price's structure. In clearing a place for play, she imagined a new form of public space, one that would: 'activate personal and political awareness of relationships and social structures' (Holdsworth, 2011: 216). Therefore, Littlewood's playgrounds were not really places for pleasure alone, but pedagogic environments for imaginative action. This approach will be considered in the next section, which attempts to respond to the *playful/experimental* problem.

III. PaR efforts: Fail Better's playground

This section will detail the Laban-influenced movement praxis in *Fail Better Fragments* (FBF), a performance installation at Warwick with the IATL Student Ensemble. The PaR experiments took place in one intensive week in April 2012 and c.60 participants attended the installation over one day. The scenography is unusual and particularly relevant to this section, so the original design has been included within the documentation (see *Fragments* design on CD-Rom). In response to the *Endlessness* experiments, we shifted our focus from the closed *theatrical/scientific* problem to the open *playful/experimental* question. In this section, I will focus only on Laban's 'efforts' system as an accessible mode of performance experimentation through play. I will apply this system to participatory theatre, and use the notion of the 'science playground' that featured in the *Fun Palace* designs, which emphasized flexibility, freedom of movement and greater agency for the participant. Throughout my analysis I will suggest that these factors create greater *permeability*²⁵ in performance. I will divide this section into three primary sub-sections (SPACE, TIME and WEIGHT), with an overview sub-section on FLOW. It will be helpful to recall McCaw's table of Laban 'efforts' here:

	Indulging	Contending
Space	Flexible	Direct
Weight	Light	Strong
Time	Sustained	Quick
Flow	Free	Bound

Table 3.2: 'concept of effort' (McCaw, 2011: 199)

²⁵ *Permeate*: 1. *Tr.* penetrate throughout; pervade; saturate. 2. *Intr.* diffuse itself (OED, 1998: 1018).

i. **SPACE (Phase 1)**



Figure 3.1: FBF (2012)

Our ecological thinking, in literally recycling materials from previous productions as creative stimulus for new work, became a defining feature of this experiment. By choosing to play with the objects we already had in storage, we adopted a new devised approach (for the company), not unlike a writer returning to their abandoned manuscripts. I will develop this inquiry via the Laban attitude of SPACE (direct or flexible) in relation to our devising method. In these experiments we created liminal performance space out of the archive, and placed production materials in relation to each other. This generated transitional spaces (between one fictional world and another) that became a highly flexible environment for devising with the performers and developing new interactions with participants.

For Laban, flexibility and directness are the measure of movement through space. Flexible (or indirect) movers: ‘apparently swim, circulate and twist most thoroughly through any possible region of space’ (McCaw, 2011: 226). Direct movers, however: ‘deal very sparingly with their moving space... take careful account of the

extension and expansion of their movements' (226). In preparing for *FBF*, the ensemble made clear choices about each role, which then impacted on their construction of SPACE in performance. For example, each performer had to select two production areas in which to embody a role. This enabled an ensemble of six to play with twelve roles from ten separate dramas.

Hence our experiments with direct and flexible use of SPACE became essential modes of transition between each area. This also enabled the devising methods to oscillate between stable 'roles' (direct engagement with specific production areas) and flexible transitions when moving as performers (and, therefore, not 'in role') from one area to another. This produced a liminal environment that encouraged the audience to engage as participants. For example, when a performer began to make a transition between characters, they were able to transform flexibly to their next role, adopting a physically nuanced interaction with space. I consider this process *permeable* as we intended audience experience to be pervaded by character transitions, with the aim that their experiences of SPACE would become saturated by the multiplicity of production areas.

The boundaries between characters and production areas were made deliberately porous and could be altered by the participants through free movement or shifts in focus. Our devising process had led to an understanding that these gaps in the fabric of performance produced dynamic encounters between participants. This increased flexibility in the piece enabled the participants to take a more direct role through movement. Laban imagines 'easy movers' as those who: 'use a great deal of flexibility and twists in their efforts' (226). Our participants seemed to enjoy a greater engagement with our installation, which was noticeable through their exploratory movements during the transitions. However, 'there are others who deal very sparingly with their moving space' (226), who would use directness as their main mode of participation. These participants were observed to follow the performers' actions and only divert for material objects that

particularly interested them: ‘as if they had an aversion against the manifold extensions of space’ (226). In order to encourage these participants to engage more fully, we created the character transitions as *permeable* sequences that required the audience to make personal decisions about SPACE.

The apparent tension between restriction and fluidity in the piece was crucial in relation to use of SPACE. The oscillation between directness and flexibility in the performers’ movement produced a spatial environment that participants could follow. This fluidity was facilitated by the *permeability* of the design, which connects to a major feature of Price’s vision for the *Fun Palace*. The reader may deduce from the *FBF* design (see CD-Rom), that SPACE was differentiated through the installation of various production areas from Fail Better’s archive. This enabled performers to wander in between a series of fictional worlds and devise multiple situations for performance. The eventual collaborative process of re-performing these fragments was completed with each audience when participants chose to make their own pathways through the archive. The indeterminate nature of our rehearsal process, using Laban ‘efforts’ throughout, allowed the piece to be finished in performance through interaction with participants. Each devised sequence was a re-performance of earlier experiments *and* a new improvisation with the material environment. I would suggest that the most tangible aspects of these variations concerned the pace of action and the speed of transition, which I will explore through the ‘effort attitude’ of TIME.

ii. **TIME (Phase 2)**

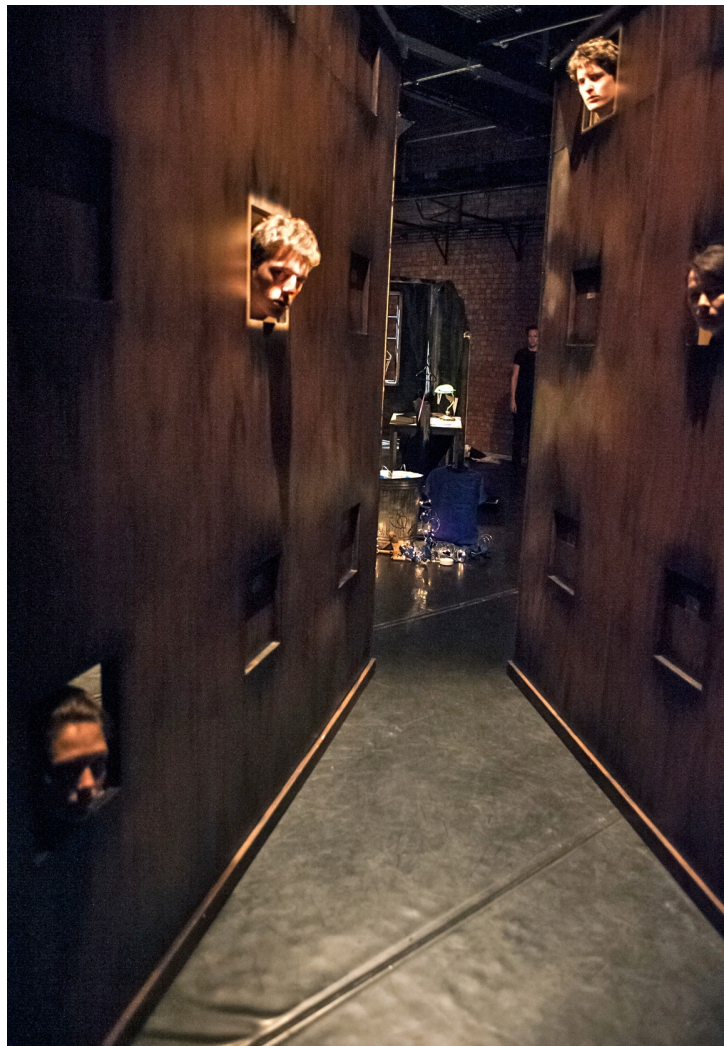


Figure 3.2: FBF (2012)

Our audiences were invited into the installation as participants at one of five half-hour performances over one day. Walking through the ‘Discords pathway’ (*Figure 3.2*), the participants were drawn into the centre of the Humanities Studio. The ensemble could then transition from the first production area to their primary character areas by moving in a shared ‘effort’ state. For example, in *Figure 3.2*, the body standing against the wall beyond the end of the pathway moved in a sustained, strong and direct way (Press) in order to draw the participants through the pathway and into the main installation.

Later in the piece, another performer's slow movement from the 'Lorca dressing room' to the 'Beckett desk space' (see *Figures 3.3 & 3.4*) protracted TIME to encourage participants to follow him.

As Laban wrote in 1947: 'People moving with easy effort seem to be freer than those moving with obviously stressed effort. The latter seem to struggle against something' (McCaw 2011: 225). Though Laban was addressing the 'psychological aspects of effort control', the following comment on is especially relevant to TIME in *FBF*: 'It becomes gradually apparent that one of the main characteristics of effort is the presence or absence of rapidity' (225). Laban defines this as 'the struggle' and 'a fight against time'. In our experiments, the performers' movement produced TIME (and SPACE) for participants. This became a tangible element of the *FBF* performances and can be understood in relation to Laban's phrase 'compound of effort' where: 'time, or speed, is one of the factors of which the compound of effort is built up' (Laban in McCaw, 2011: 225). As one feature of *FBF* was to experiment through play, the potential for the many functions of compound effort that emerged in participant movements was especially telling. Audience feedback indicates temporality was understood in a variety of ways.

For example, protracted slowness compounded both TIME and SPACE attitudes so that participants could immerse themselves in the material archive by creating 'gaps' in performance when they could explore the fragments. For example, a performer could slow down TIME in order to pass the digital projection in the *Echo and Narcissus* area en route to the private desk space in the *Diary of a Madman* corner. However, TIME could quicken when rehearsed moments took place within the production areas, drawing the participants into one shared place. The effect of this was to establish a temporary moment of shared experience out of multiple personal journeys. By exposing the participants to 'compounds of effort', ensemble movement would influence the mood of the performance through rapidity or slowness. The effect of this

was to draw together (then rupture) the participants' flow of movement. In order to more fully understand these compounds, the next Phase considers the 'effort attitude' of WEIGHT.

iii. WEIGHT (Phase 3)



Figures 3.3 & 3.4: FBF (2012)

This sub-section demonstrates how heavy (strong) or light 'compounds of effort' enabled greater interaction with the material fragments in performance for participants. We wanted a physical *permeability* to accompany the experience of atmospheric diffusion of SPACE and TIME in the room. The ability of participants to view the piece from multiple locations was an important example of this, as it increased the fluidity of movement and three-dimensional participation. We wanted participants to evolve equal access to the materials in the same ways as the ensemble, so we developed playful strategies for engaging them with physical objects. For example, the quills and lamp in the *Diary of a Madman* corner (glimpsed in *Figure 3.3* through the window) could be

directly observed from a variety of angles and distances. However, the objects on the desks for *Rough for Theatre II* (in the foreground of *Figure 3.3*) could be viewed simultaneously, which created a visual parallel between the two production areas. A triangulation of images was also made possible if a participant looked through the Lorca dressing area from *Play Without a Title* (shown in *Figure 3.4*), where the actress applied make-up and consulted her script, straight through to the *Rough for Theatre II* desks (and beyond to other production areas). I would like to consider aspects of performer movement that conditioned the participants' spectatorship in this situation.

I have shown how SPACE (direct or flexible) and TIME (sustained or quick) can protract or condense action for the spectator. These 'compounds of effort' have been shown to affect the participants' physical experience of *FBF*, and I will suggest here that the differentiation of WEIGHT was extremely valuable. A good example of this would be a performer transitioning from a light compound (e.g. Glide) to a heavy compound (e.g. Press). While participants more readily notice TIME and SPACE visually, the attitude of WEIGHT often *feels* somatically different in performance and invites an alternative form of participation. Moving alongside a performer in a Glide (light, direct and sustained) as s/he moves into a Press (strong, direct, sustained) alters the compound of effort, but it may not be immediately obvious how this has occurred. The heaviness that descends upon the performance of action was compelling when dealing with material objects. Laban would consider this transition in terms of *gravity*, where: 'the person whose bodily energy is lacking seems to enjoy his weightiness and to relax happily in being immersed in the general *gravity* of nature' (in McCaw, 2011: 225). We used WEIGHT as a physical force that could be enacted when the ensemble manipulated material objects on set. We defined this as the extent to which the performers were 'immersed in the general gravity' of the archive.

This was most apparent in a state of character transition when I could observe the corporeal lightness of performers ‘dabbing’ or ‘gliding’ towards a fragment. However, once they had completed the transition towards the fragment, they sometimes could be seen to submit to the ‘gravity’ of the specific production area and its objects. For example, one performer abandoned the materials in the Lorca dressing area from *Play Without a Title* and focused upon the objects of the desks from *Rough for Theatre II*. As this performer made their character transition from Lorca’s director (in *Play Without a Title*) to Beckett’s bureaucrat (in *Rough for Theatre II*), the movement shifted from a Press to a Dab. Furthermore, in the liminal state of a transition (where light becomes strong and vice versa), I observed participants move into spaces vacated by performers so they could interact with the material objects that had just been set down by the ensemble.

Just as Littlewood had planned to achieve in her *Fun Palace*, *FBF* aimed for performance that would produce differentiated meanings through the participants’ enhanced interaction with material objects. Nomi Everall’s *FBF* design clearly shows how material objects were arranged within production areas (see CD-Rom). In comparison, Price’s design details ‘scientific gadgetry... learning machines... laboratories...’ (Holdsworth, 2011: 213) in a ‘science playground’ that collapses boundaries between art/science, work/play and public/private. While the *FBF* installation did not directly reference Price’s architectural designs, they both encouraged similar patterns of movement, where different effort attitudes would enable varied participatory play with material objects. While we cannot know precisely how *WEIGHT* would have been used in the *Fun Palace*, there are clues in Littlewood’s writing and her subsequent practice with young people. Her ability to apply Laban’s ‘efforts’ to theatre practice, and then to apply that to community interventionism, demonstrates at least one evolution of Laban’s ‘efforts’ in performance practice. In our experiments, *WEIGHT* was expressed by performer responses to the strong gravitational pull of objects, scenery

and character, while it could be released through the disengagement from this force through lighter movement. The impact of this upon our performers was an atmospheric and forceful change in the bodily dynamics (like a plane landing suddenly or a rollercoaster gaining speed), which signaled the beginning of a character transition. In summary, the WEIGHT of movement was a third-dimension that combined with TIME and SPACE in order to promote *permeable* action.

iv. FLOW (overview)



Figure 3.5: FBF (2012)

[See FBF video (silent) at 19m00s on CD-Rom]

This sub-section will take a holistic view of FLOW during these experiments. As we have seen, the differentiations of SPACE (direct or flexible), TIME (sustained or quick) and WEIGHT (strong or light) produced ‘compounds of effort’ that encouraged participatory play through experimental movement. For Laban:

The three effort-attitudes towards the time factor, weight factor and space factor do not, however, cover all the basic phenomena observable. Persons do not move either suddenly or deliberately, weakly or forcefully, flexibly or directly only. There exists another factor, flow, which can be observed in people's movements, which together with the three factors mentioned above might give us a basis for a full account of effort phenomena. (Laban in McCaw, 2011: 226–7)

I will draw together the temporal, spatial and forceful attitudes in relation to 'the flow factor'. I have shown that *FBF* responded to Laban's challenge that: 'space is a superabundance of simultaneous movements' (in McCaw, 2011: 182). This allowed audience members to un/consciously experiment through FLOW (bound or free) within the installation. The ensemble moved between flexible and direct uses of SPACE, but mainly worked within bound FLOW during the performance. This was especially apparent during rehearsed action though there were opportunities for participants to experiment with free FLOW during the character transitions. For example, the performer in the foreground of *Figure 3.5* is shown to be undertaking a direct character transition from Spectator in Lorca's *Play without a Title* to Hippolytus in Kane's *Phaedra's Love*. His scored and bound FLOW could be opened up into to free FLOW if participants chose to interact with him.

I have already suggested that these gaps in the performance event can be understood as being *permeable*. The fluctuation between bound and free FLOW of movement allowed TIME, WEIGHT and SPACE to shift dynamically during the performance. These moments of *permeability* are best understood in terms of FLOW: 'which can be free or bound, whatever velocity, space extension or force the movements might have' (Laban in McCaw, 2011: 227). Where the participants followed an individual performer during a character transition they were bound by the rhythm of rehearsed action. Where they followed a character into a new production area, they were freer to

‘indulge in’ (Laban’s term) the FLOW of improvised action. Where the participants indulged their own movements around the space, choosing whichever fragments to interact with, they were momentarily in free FLOW as described by Laban:

People who indulge in flow find pleasure in the unrestricted freedom of fluency, without necessarily giving much attention to the various shades of the time, the weight and the space development of the movement. Movements with free flow cannot be easily interrupted or suddenly stopped; it takes time until the moving person gains the necessary control over the flow to stop. Those persons who bind their flow will be able to stop at any moment.

(Laban in McCaw, 2011: 227)

This possibility of a completely free pathway through the performance event was a radical action adopted by very few participants. Most adopted a bound FLOW by following rehearsed or improvised performance (observing the action as drama). In this sense, most audience members ‘struggled against’ rather than ‘indulged in’ FLOW in performance. Laban’s distinction ‘struggle/indulge’ is a particularly useful binary formulation for reflecting upon the participants’ movement. Sometimes they seemed to be struggling against the character transitions or even the fragments themselves. The deliberate sensory overload within the installation was an important aspect of this struggle, as there was no permanent focal point, only a selection of distributed fragments, creating a tension between the archive (that which is retrievable materially) and the repertoire (that which must be re-performed).



Figure 3.6: Post-FBF event (2012)

This indulgence in, or struggle against, the FLOW of theatrical performance was accentuated by a final event in which an invited audience returned to the installation to participate in a play reading (see *Figure 3.6*). This opportunity enabled the archive to remain open to new activities (e.g. a group reading of *Crave* by Sarah Kane) to mark Fail Better's tenth anniversary as a theatre company. The Kane Estate had given special permission for this reading to take place, and the network of bodies that appear in the photograph above show technicians, academics, practitioners, clinicians and students. While a play reading may seem a particularly conservative way of marking this moment in the company's evolution, the collaborative way in which it was done is worth emphasis. The four *Crave* characters (A, B, C and M) were shared collectively, sub-dividing the assembled participants into four groups, and each group was allocated a space in the installation. Observing the audience interactions in this final stage of the event, and in the absence of differentiated performers, the participants appeared to display more freedom within the space and achieved higher levels of *permeability*.

Figure 3.6 shows this final act of collaboration in order to explore the space as a venue where readings and public events could take place. Before we dismantled the installation and returned the venue to its default empty space, we wanted to explore a temporary community within the installation. This instance of community, exemplifies the informal impact that a Fun Palace might have within an academic or civic space. Drawing upon Newlove's *Laban for All* (2004), I would argue that these moments of community before/during/after performances might be useful examples of what Littlewood imagined as a 'university of the streets'. However, I acknowledge here that notions of 'community' should be treated carefully when researching performance (cf. Read, 2013). In our case, by inviting the participants back into the space, and attempting to dissolve the hierarchical distinction between audience and ensemble, we produced a temporary community in an indeterminate structure. Our structure was not specifically a 'Fun Palace', but an experimental playground nonetheless. In my next section, I will consider this indeterminate environment as a 'laboratory of fun', which has the capacity for rejuvenating education through collaboration (as in *co-labour*). For Littlewood this ambition was expressed as follows: 'in the science playground... the wondering scholars of the future – the mystics, the skeptics and sophists – can dispute till dawn' (1994: 704).

IV. **'A laboratory of fun': experimental playgrounds**

Fail Better Fragments (FBF) responded to Clive Barker's claim for 'the actor as social scientist', while paradoxically acknowledging that: 'there is no such activity as "acting" [per se]. The actor presents aspects or images of human behaviour and interaction on the stage, through his presence and controlled relationships with other actors' (1977: 211). As our experiments took place in one of the classrooms where Barker worked, the University of Warwick Humanities Studio, his words are particularly evocative here: 'I will go to my grave believing that the actor could be the most important experimental

social scientist in the world' (213). However, there are more than happy co-incidences behind these reflections. Firstly, Barker also had a strong biographical and pedagogical connection to Littlewood (joining *Theatre Workshop* in 1955), reporting her as saying: "in order to be a creative artist you must risk failure", and, "go out to fail, not to succeed" (1977: 3). Secondly, Barker's *Theatre Games* (1977) is one of the first manuals of theatre practice to explicitly cover both 'laboratory work' (131, 149) and 'the nervous system' (219). Barker's quasi-scientific approach is also resonant of his identity as *Scholar/Clown*: 'who not only understands the scholarly aspects of Drama and the Theatre Arts, but can put them into practice' (215). This identity recalls both Laban's work within movement education and Littlewood's vision for 'fun' laboratories. Barker writes that: 'areas of work I have outlined [in this conclusion] could some day, somewhere form the basis for a body of sociological, educational or theatrical research of a practice nature over a sustained period' (218), and perhaps one such endeavor might be PaR itself. I will extend the notion of the *Scholar/Clown* in this final section, especially the problems it poses for experimenting (as a scholar) through participatory play (as a clown).

Littlewood imagined a new function for playing within her *Fun Palace* vision, the 'acting area will afford the therapy of theatre for everyone... and perhaps find stimulus in social research' (1994: 704). This theatre space – within a 'fun' laboratory, housing an indeterminate structure – made use of dramatic narrative to encourage social learning through play. In light of the PaR examples above, I am particularly interested that Littlewood made room for theatre within her futuristic vision. It is especially important that she envisaged this would have a therapeutic value for the participants. While the *Fun Palace*, like *FBF*, used performance strategies for participation (interaction, installation, informality), the conventions of event came from theatre practice (sets, props, characters). By emphasizing the therapeutic benefits of the acting area, Littlewood revealed that there was a future for theatre within participatory play. Indeed, through her

science playground and the learning machines within, Littlewood also exposed her debt to the European modernists, especially Stanislavski and Laban. Their systems, foregrounding physical action and (what is now called) ‘the embodied mind’, had clearly informed Littlewood’s abandonment of the theatre building in search of new forms of architecture for participatory performance.

This shift out of old theatre buildings into new public spaces recalls my reading of Read’s *Theatre in the Expanded Field* (2013) in the introductory chapter. Finding a way ‘to recover and retool *theatre* practices whose relevance to pressing contemporary dilemmas demands attention’, Read argues, via ‘the reactivation of previously excluded theatre practices through the genetic irritations of performance’ (xxxix). Read’s notion of ‘theatre and (&) performance: one an abandoned practice for ever to be recited, resuscitated and reviewed; the other a gene, ubiquitous, endemic and constantly evolving its immunity to the theatrical medium’ (xxxix) is relevant here. Littlewood’s abandonment of the theatre in the 1960s for a new form of performance practice (variously ‘a laboratory of fun’, ‘a university of the streets’ and ‘a science playground’) recovered the radical potential of theatre *practice*. Speaking in the 1968 interview, she imagined that these new participants would ‘find new forms in new places’ and ‘shall know that to dance is also to think’ (BFIB1064). Read suggests that: ‘we no longer need new buildings for the production and appreciation of new ideas, but can find ways of recycling or intervening in other realms and disciplines in an expanded field of performance’ (xxxvii). I would like to argue that Littlewood’s ludic projects (*Fun Palace* and *Learn to Play*) and contemporary performance practices (exemplified by FBF) ‘intervene’ rather than represent. In doing so, they reject the established forms of

theatrical production and return to the ancient roots of drama (play, action, deed).

Performance *performs*²⁶ itself.

I would suggest that these places for experimental performance function as playgrounds (rather than the traditional playhouses, that draw an ‘audience’). Just as Littlewood found herself clearing spaces for play in 1960s Stratford East, contemporary practitioners have to excavate cultural locations and negotiate public spaces in order to create performance work. In the case of *FBF*, this took the form of creating a temporary community to inhabit our archive through participation. With *Endlessness*, we vacated a theatrical studio in order to conduct scientific experiments with performance. *Discords* is a more problematic example, but the journey from the closed *BeckettLab* to the open *Beckett and Brain Science* workshop (via *Discords*) was an anti-theatrical strategy to promote participatory performance. Indeed, the PaR processes that have followed the three examples in this thesis have been far more interventionist in approach, and Fail Better Productions has not since performed in a traditional playhouse. As I will argue in my Conclusion, the PaR materials covered in these chapters have stimulated new creative processes that: ‘find ways of recycling or intervening in other realms and disciplines in an expanded field of performance’ (Read, 2013: xxxvii). *FBF* was the final stage of a process of recycling theatrical materials to evolve a transdisciplinary performance practice, which has since focused more on *play* than *experiment*. To cite Littlewood: ‘I’ve finished with putting on plays. I don’t like the theatre... at the moment I’m more interested in my children’s playground’ (in Holdsworth, 2011: 234)

As I move towards a conclusion for this chapter, I would like to return to the apparent paradox of a *fun laboratory*, which I express as the *playful/experimental* problem. Littlewood’s *Fun Palace* participants (now activated as part of the 2014 project) have a

²⁶ Perform (v.): c.1300 “carry into effect, fulfill, discharge,” via Anglo-French *performer*, altered (by influence of Old French *forme* “form”) from Old French *parfornir* “to do, carry out, finish, accomplish,” from *par-* “completely” + *fornir* “to provide” (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2014)

ludic relationship to learning, though science playgrounds or therapeutic role-playing. The importance for these activities to be playful, as well as pedagogic, introduces a slight contradiction in her vision (to educate *and* entertain, if you will). While ‘playful play’ (Bateson and Martin, 2013) and ‘experiential learning’ (Kolb, 1984) are not mutually exclusive, they focus the mind on different outcomes: playing vs. learning. The various meanings of play will be explored further in the final chapter, but I would suggest that Laban, Newlove and Littlewood meant *ludic* play, rather than chaotic play. *Ludus* is rule-bound, sporting and progressive, whereas other forms of play can be haphazard, violent and destructive. If Littlewood and Price had really wanted those wild forms of play in the *Fun Palace*, then the structure and its machines would have been destroyed by its participants. Although the *Fun Palace* (like *FBF*) was indeterminate, it was still highly regulated and ordered. Even children’s playgrounds are designed to eliminate the more chaotic forms of play.

However, Laban’s ‘efforts’ system is more radical as it uses the ecological structures that he found in crystallography and re-imagines them around the human body. In doing so, he created the ultimate indeterminate structure (the shifting space around people) and put them in charge of their own movement choices. His movement vocabulary encourages playful action in pedagogic situations but only through a series of *self-reflexive* events. The term *laboratory* is therefore primarily metaphorical here.

Littlewood’s final evolution of his system allowed her to reject the theatre (and its fetishized ‘empty space’) in favour of Laban’s ‘superabundance of simultaneous movements’ (in McCaw, 2011: 182). Littlewood’s notion of the ‘science playground’ suggests that participants can immerse themselves in a *ludic* environment for the purpose of kinesthetic learning and/or physical education. I would like to suggest that this is only possible via the ‘effort attitude’ of FLOW, where bound action gives way to free-flowing movement. As I documented in the *FBF* experiments, Laban’s sense of FLOW

(indulging in/struggling against) affects the other attitudes of SPACE, TIME and WEIGHT. In order to argue that the evolution of Laban's methods in both the *Fun Palace* and *FBF* articulates a new understanding of FLOW within performance events, I will draw upon one final historical account of Littlewood's practice (Goorney, 1981) alongside a contemporary manual relating to Laban's 'efforts' (Panet, 2009). This will allow me to draw together the historiographical and practice-based strands of this chapter to argue that experimental playgrounds can also be seen as laboratories.

For Howard Goorney, writing in *The Theatre Workshop Story*: 'Joan's faith in the viability of the Fun Palace was not shared by her closest colleagues in the theatre, and they offered no support' (1981: 134). John Bury went as far as to comment: 'the actual experiment was those girls in that muddy hut outside the theatre. Gerry [Raffles] couldn't see it coming to anything' (134). However, in order to fully understand why Littlewood placed such a heavy importance on human movement, it is necessary to return to the holistic nature of the ensemble:

There can be nothing wrong with a group theatre if all the members work for the same ideals and sincerely dare to express their beliefs in words, song and movement. But every member is also obliged to develop personally and individually and contribute with his ideas and criticism. If you then, as Rudolf Laban wrote, 'are tackling fundamental problems as individual actors and the Group as a whole,' the theatre becomes that true reflection of life it is meant to be. Theatre Workshop has always struggled for that truth. (1981: 195)

In comparison, Fail Better used *FBF* to re-create their ensemble within a university community. This enabled some actor training to take place, but primarily it marked a significant change in our performance practice. This approach caused a rupture in our production processes (theatre), as the FLOW of experimental practice (performance) required open-ended processes. While *FBF* can be positioned in time as one week in

2012, one of the processes it instigated has become a durational ‘ensemble network’ which is deliberately future-orientated (*Emerge*, Warwick Arts Centre and IATL, 2014). My own practice sought to reanimate theatre practice through a greater awareness of its participatory capacity as performance. To reimagine each individual theatre experiment as part of a wider performance network would require a transdisciplinary version of complexity science that I do not have at my disposal. However, to begin to understand the human movement within experimental performance as a network of embodied action is possible here. From Laban, Littlewood drew practical methods but also ensemble values such as: ‘tackling fundamental problems as individual actors and the Group as a whole’ (in Goorney, 1981: 195). Littlewood’s response to Laban that: ‘Theatre Workshop has always struggled for that truth’ (195), is also a challenge for our ensemble network, which I would characterize in terms of the *permeability* of performance. ‘Tackling fundamental problems’ simultaneously as individuals and companies, demonstrates one way in which theatre *practices* can be resuscitated within performance events.

As we have seen, the *permeable* inter-relationship between participant and performer is made possible through free-flowing movement. Like Newlove’s use of Laban with Theatre Workshop, the ‘effort attitudes’ remain open to evolutionary epistemology through moving bodies trying to learn:

The first point of immediate interest in effort study is the theory that movements are bound to evolve in space as well as in time – if one prefers to say so, in Space-Time – and that in this evolution of movement the weight of the body is brought into flow. (1981: 229)

These free-flowing pathways produce knowledge in performance through movement. This knowledge becomes available to the ‘indulger in’ (participating in free-flowing movement), as opposed to the ‘fighter against’ (who struggles with the effort attitudes).

Laban's phrase 'the indulger in' has a particular resonance for Littlewood's theatre practice *and* her ludic projects. The *Fun Palace* would have provided a venue for 'indulgence in' efforts so as to promote mental health and wellbeing. Her interest in the therapeutic benefits of participatory play has been described above, but I would like to suggest that it also informs Barker's concept of the *Scholar/Clown* (1977: 215). Barker (via Littlewood and Laban) imagines the 'actor as social scientist' and the academic as *Scholar/Clown*, which both suggest a ludic relationship to knowledge and learning. The clown can (and will) *fail*; the scholar could (and should) more often. Indulging in experimental play, rather than struggling against it, allows the actor/academic to fail more readily and learn through error.

My own practice on Laban was drawn from the teachings of Bridget Panet, as set down in *Essential Acting* (2009), which constitutes a further evolution of Laban's principles. Like Littlewood, Panet's method combines Stanislavski and Laban, having learned this approach from Maxwell Shaw, a member of *Theatre Workshop*. Panet writes:

In developing his Method of Physical Action, Stanislavski searched in vain for a reliable, systematic breakdown of behavioral movement and rhythm; I think we would have found what he was looking for in Laban's analysis of action – the combination of the two provides, in my experience, all that the actor needs to be confident, to have a sustained feeling of truth in his acting, and to increasing his ability to practice and improve his craft. (2009: xvi)

Panet's pedagogic focus on the personal and professional development of the actor echoes Barker's *Scholar/Clown* and Littlewood's ludic projects. It is this legacy of practice that has informed Fail Better's work with the Student Ensemble to develop transdisciplinary performance. As I have suggested above, indulging in FLOW is of central importance to these projects. For Panet: 'flow is practical, structured, a thoughtful, considered action or an immediate response to a crisis; it is essentially a

building, creative process requiring form, outline and structure' (200). Panet finds a function for Laban in the same way that Newlove evolved his 'efforts' system for Littlewood. The application of Laban's movement praxis to new playgrounds and laboratories has been the lasting impact of Littlewood's later period (1960s onwards), despite the whimsy of her late writings (i.e. *Joans' Book*, 1994). Indeed Laban's approach to movement also has been criticized for being somewhat mystical, though his poetic writings can also be metaphysically profound: 'Together with Stir/Together in space, together in time/Stillness and Stir' (Laban in Ullmann, 1984: 70). Through his direct influence on the scientific playgrounds and fun laboratories of the 1960s and after, Laban has shown practitioners how to distil movement through FLOW and stillness through stir (i.e. *non-movement-in-movement*).

As Goorney notes, when Littlewood's group: 'moved indoors in 1933, a radical new approach to the whole system of acting was needed... an intuitive process, a period of experimentation and trial and error – there were no guidelines to follow' (1981: 158). The absence of guidelines in performance tends to inspire an experimental group to create their own rules. In short: Littlewood's laboratory always resembled a playground. While the highly prescriptive methods of other post-war practitioners (e.g. Devine, Gaskill, Hall, Brook etc.) have come to represent a period of radical change in the British Theatre, I suggest that Littlewood's early work (Theatre Union and Theatre Workshop) and her late work (*Fun Palace* and *Learn to Play*) were far more revolutionary. Her fusion of Stanislavski with Laban was particularly striking, and her knowledge of the latter 'before the war' (158) and the recruitment of Newlove (after the war) enabled a profound engagement with corporeal training in the decades that followed. As Goorney testifies: 'with Jean's help we were able to extend our range of efforts, rather than always falling back on those which came most naturally' (159). In this state of: 'fluidity and awareness

[cf. FLOW] the set eventually becoming an extension of the actors rather than a series of obstacles to be coped with' (160).

This final statement on the materiality of FLOW has a special resonance with *FBF* where an installation of physical objects and theatrical materials enabled (rather than inhibited) participatory play. Our experimental playground therefore produced a *permeable* event for a 'superabundance of simultaneous movements' (Laban in McCaw, 2011: 182). In practice, this multiplicity required a practical method for focusing energy in the space and between the participants. Laban's 'effort attitudes' provided such a method, allowing us to experiment with theatrical form, but also to re-direct the flow of participation within the performance. We animated the archive *as a repertoire* (cf. Diana Taylor, 2003) and the materiality of the installation became 'an extension of the actors rather than a series of obstacles to be coped with' (Goorney, 1981: 160). The flow of movement in an experimental playground can therefore function as a laboratory for new patterns of human embodiment. It is through this channel that theatre *practices* can become transdisciplinary through performance *events*. In the Conclusion I will consider the flow of movement within performance as a form of playfulness. In order to articulate a new epistemology for play, I will compare and contrast Laban's FLOW with Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow experience' (1975).

Conclusion

This is not a theatre. Smash down the doors, and that's when we'll see it for what it really is.

(Garcia Lorca, 2008: 81)

I. Three Problems in Performance

I return to Lorca's *Play Without a Title* here to revisit the themes of my Introduction. 'This is not a theatre' is the refrain of the Director in that play, and it could serve as an over-arching epigraph for the thesis as a whole. My Fail Better projects experimented *with* theatre, *through* theatre, *on* theatre, they did so to investigate performance *and* play. This Conclusion draws together my three performance problems in order to better understand the relationship between flow and play in PaR processes. While my chapters used specific examples from Fail Better Productions, plus the practices of Devine, Brook and Littlewood, I will focus here on questions relating to Beckett, Artaud and Laban. I will discuss the findings of Chapters 1–3 and re-cap the three problems behind this thesis. These problems can be understood as a tension between free/bound forms of flow, through which *playful*, *theatrical* and *organic* (freer) and *experimental*, *scientific* and *mechanical* (more bound) processes have informed the PaR.

In each of the examples there has been an apparent paradox between a highly regulated *disciplinarity* (rehearsal, laboratory, archive) and an indeterminate *playfulness* (repetition, reflexivity, recycling) that I will anatomize below. I will show that 'playfulness' can be understood as distinct from the generic 'play', which tends to involve some form of structure and rule-bound gaming. Conversely, I will return to ideas from my Introduction, where disciplinarity in the twenty-first century emerges as far more fluid and performative than previously assumed (cf. Frodeman et al., 2012). By troubling distinctions between *disciplined* practice and *playful* research, I will explore how my own examples of historiographical PaR respond to the complexity of PaR as 'unfinished

thinking’ (Borgdorff 2012: 194). Ultimately, this indeterminacy in experimental processes is epistemic rather than ontological, as my research on the *plasticity/reflexivity/permeability* of performance (in Chapters 1–3 respectively) has aimed to show. The ‘different kind of failure’ (Eliot, 1940)²⁷ that PaR generates has the capacity to gather knowledge for transdisciplinary performance studies. I will first detail the three problems as different ‘kinds of failure’ (Ii) then I will consider ludic practices as ‘varieties of play’ (Iii) before concluding this section with ‘forms of embodiment’ (Iiii). This will establish the theoretical territory before I address each historiographical example in turn and in relation my own practice (II). I will then investigate the interrelationship of ‘playful play’ and flow in a penultimate section (III) before offering a final reflection on PaR as transdisciplinary ‘unfinished thinking’ (IV).

i. Kinds of failure

It has been an aim of this thesis to demonstrate that historiography and PaR can become entangled in generative ways. I dealt with the discursive potential of this entanglement in my Introduction and I propose to disentangle Chapters 1–3 as follows:

<i>Theatre histories</i>	<i>PaR experiments</i>	<i>Discursive problem</i>
Devine ‘de-/re-humanises’ Beckett’s <i>Play</i>	<i>Discords</i> re-uses Beckettian ‘mechanisms’	The <i>organic/mechanical</i> in performance
Brook ‘applies/betrays’ Artaud for the <i>Theatre of Cruelty</i>	<i>Endlessness</i> repeats Artaudian ‘laboratories’	The <i>theatrical/scientific</i> in performance
Littlewood ‘adapts/evolves’ Laban for the <i>Fun Palace</i>	<i>Fail Better Fragments</i> recycles Laban-like ‘efforts’	The <i>playful/experimental</i> in performance

Table 4.1: Summary of Chapters 1–3

²⁷ Trying to learning to use words, and every attempt / Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure (Eliot, *East Coker*, 1940)

This table summarizes how three historical case studies have been positioned in relation to the PaR experiments, to generate three problems of performance practice, which I have called: a) the *organic/mechanical* problem, b) *theatrical/scientific* problem and c) the *playful/experimental* problem. I will move these problems on by first synthesizing them through similarities and then demarcating their differences. I will then draw upon theories of play and embodiment in order to support a holistic tension between the *disciplined* and the *playful* in performance.

The three problems identified above have some important similarities. In thinking about the *organic* and the *mechanical*, I have tried to understand a paradox that haunts my own practice and practitioners' archives. It seems that at every level of analysis (theatrical, experimental, phenomenological), there has emerged an apparent contradiction between an organism and a mechanism (e.g. the process and the production). Perspectives from the life sciences, and neurology specifically, have provided the thesis with the opportunity to view this dichotomy as an interwoven example of 'organic machinery' (Ramon y Cajal, 1904; Malabou, 2008; Salisbury and Shail, 2011). Contemporary science has continued to translate complex biological mechanisms of consciousness (Damasio, 1999) and epigenetics (Carey, 2012) for a lay audience. These 'popular science' texts allow arts practitioners and humanities researchers to see their work from diverse viewpoints, and in the process, demonstrate how genetic mechanisms can be altered by organic events. This has begun to inform performance research in unexpected ways. *Routledge Advances in Theatre & Performance*, for example, includes several 'scientific' studies of theatre (i.e. Giannachi, 2009; Pitches, 2009; Benedetto, 2010; McConachie and Hart, 2010) that focus on questions of biopolitics, psychology, cognition and sensation.

In the example of Devine's production of *Play* at the Old Vic, there was a quasi-epigenetic revolution playing out through experimental theatre. For Devine, rehearsal was 'an organic process' and Beckett's play was 'experimental work'. For Tynan, the play needed 're-humanising' and the performers, for one critic, 'bleep like electronic machines ... like well-regulated mechanisms' (RNT/PR/4/1/4). By comparison, the PaR experiment *Discords* attempted to reconstruct these performance conditions by devising an organic response to a mechanical score. I have attempted to position these processes within the interdisciplinary study of 'neuroplasticity' (cf. Malabou, 2008), where organic phenomena can affect bio-mechanisms. I re-iterate these examples here so that I can compare the *organic/mechanical* problem with the *theatrical/scientific* problem.

'Theatre and Science', for Artaud, was a kind of 'total physiological revolution' which is a 'supercharged compression of a body' (1947, in Schumacher and Singleton, 1989). I argued in the Chapter 2 that this ambition influenced Brook and other convenors of 1960s laboratory theatres. However, it is possible to refine this thinking still further. Nicholas Salazar-Sutil (2010) has argued that Artaud's 'decisive transfusion' places special emphasis on blood: 'a substance which continuously circulates and mediates' (119). This essay demonstrates how a focus blood flow can subvert the conventional focus on mind-body that Artaud had rejected by 1936. Salazar-Sutil explains this as follows: what 'Artaud had in mind was a passage or transfusion from mere recording organisms to bodies without organs, from corporeality to trans-corporeality, where body and mind would finally be redeemed' (119). He concludes that in this process of 'transfusion' (which was 'geometrical, mathematical, organic'): 'Artaud only succeed[ed] in drawing blood at his own self-crucifixion' (124).

Indeed, Artaud's own experience of psychiatric distress could explain his fevered imaginings and delusions of grandeur (see Jannarone, 2011). Sadly, these biographical accounts of Artaud's life clearly support the argument that his hyper-awareness of

embodiment was due to his own physiological fragmentation and disordered selfhood. Nonetheless, Artaud's influence on theatre practitioners of the 1960s has emerged as a flawed attempt to open performance to phenomena beyond itself (science, philosophy, theology, anthropology). An 'interdisciplinary turn' in theatre studies was driven by scholars, such as Roach and Fischer-Lichte, who were directly influenced by the practices of the 1960s and this had led to a current hybridity in research methods. The use of perspectives from the sciences has produced research that could be framed as interdisciplinary theatre studies (as opposed to transdisciplinary performance studies).

I have cited various examples of this within the thesis, for example: Shepherd-Barr (2006), Kershaw (2007), Read (2008), Maude (2009), McMullan (2010), Nicholson (2011), Fleishman (2012), and Nelson (2013). In this multi-/inter-/trans-disciplinary shift, there has been a defense of performance *as* a learning medium (and research method), and the implications of this are two-fold: a) that performance, and more broadly, play could be more valued by the academy, and b) that science, and more broadly, epistemology needs more playful and performative systems to evolve. This was particularly true of the PaR experiment *Endlessness*, which would have been more successful had the artists and scientists been able to share the same process under the same spatial-temporal conditions.

For the *experimental/playful* problem, there has been a significant distinction between playfulness and experimentation, which I explored as a tension between participatory play and scholarly research (re. the *Fun Palace* and *Fail Better Fragments*). However, as Chapters 2 & 3 have shown, there can be playful forms of experimentation and experimental forms of play. This difference allows me to develop a more nuanced definition of play per se, before exploring different kinds of flow within playfulness.

ii. Varieties of play

I first make a distinction between spontaneous play and structured play, drawing upon the work of Roger Callois (1961), who distinguishes between *paidia* and *ludus*. In *A Philosophy of Sport* (2011) Steven Connor describes this difference in the following terms: ‘*paidia* signifies the basic freedom of the instinct to play as indicated in activities involving improvisation and the delight in various forms of tumult, agitation and disorderly, unpredictable movement, and *ludus* signifies the development of rules in what we call organized sports’ (24). Connor’s sporting monograph places a particular emphasis on play, but he develops his argument further via Callois: ‘there is *ilinx*, which describes those kinds of games in which the pleasures of vertigo and disorientation are paramount... and then there is *agon*, characterized as “a combat in which equality of chances is artificially created” [Callois, 1961]’ (Connor, 2011: 24). It would seem that the wild and freer *paidia* and *ilinx* could be shaped by the rule-bound *ludus* and *agon* that would be a relevant frame to my own *organic/mechanical* problem. Furthermore, the ways in which Connor describes sport, as both a public ritual and a bio-medical challenge, calls to mind my *theatrical/scientific* problem. Indeed, by synthesizing these problems as one ‘grand’ problem between the *playful* and the *disciplined* in performance, I can identify questions for future research. I would like to investigate the *discipline/play* problem more widely, though what Michael Anton Budd calls ‘body performance’ (1997: xv).

While Callois imagines a continuum for play between *paidia* and *ludus*, and a spectrum for sport that moves from *ilinx* and *agon*, I propose a matrix for the study of performance as play (*Figure 4.1*):

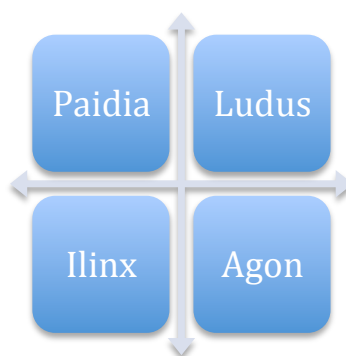


Figure 4.1: Play matrix (after Connor, 2011)

Performance as play manifests itself in many forms of human culture, but my primary play-form here will be *paidia* (spontaneous play/performance), alongside its rule-bound twin *ludus* (structured play/performance). These forms of play are those most associated with *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Huizinga, 1949), where: ‘play is to be understood here not as a biological phenomenon but as a cultural phenomenon. It is approached historically, not scientifically’ (ix). Huizinga’s contribution to the field of play studies was substantial, and I will show below (IV) how his ideas influenced contemporary play theory.

By contrast, I will return to Robert Crease’s ‘scientific’ *Play of Nature* (1993) in order to reconsider ludic knowledge: ‘Play is here meant in the sense of an infinite, ceaseless activity that exhibits a myriad of forms in as many situations. Yet this play is not chaotic or random but governed by patterned, discoverable constraints’ (184). For Crease, that indeterminate force is neither *ilinx* (because it is not chaotic), nor *agon* (because it is ceaseless). However, his play does share some features of *paidia* and *ludus* through its ‘myriad of forms’. Crease uses theatrical performance to understand scientific method, and demonstrates ‘how the scripts change accordingly’ (184). His philosophical project is more critical of science than it is of theatre, and I would suggest that Crease had a limited working knowledge of performance practice. Nonetheless, his thesis is useful here for two reasons: a) play is revealed to have a central role in epistemology,

even in the epistemic processes of scientific laboratories, and b) scientific experimentation can be viewed *as performance*, in comparable ways to PaR processes.

In *Figure 4.1*, the four varieties of play flow in each direction from a voided core. However, there are permeable boundaries between each of the four varieties. For example, the organic processes of *paidia* can flow alongside the mechanical structures of *ludus*, or the sudden violence of *agon* can draw from its chaotic twin *ilinx*. In the case of observing human play behaviour for epistemological purposes, these distinctions (and parallels) would be useful to notate movement or document the sudden explosion from one category to another. Plotting my PaR on this matrix has enabled me to consider the assumption that *both* play and experiment can be modes of performance. Firstly, I will argue that the three performance problems articulated above constitute different varieties of a tension between *paidia* (free play) and *ludus* (bound play), but I will not assume that *paidia* is *organic play* or *ludus* is *mechanical play*, as I am keen to avoid, what the young Samuel Beckett called, ‘the neatness of identifications’ (1929). This would over-simplify the profound complexity of each process. However, I will now explore how these manifestations of play interrogate the experiments discussed in Chapters 1–3.

The alternative forms of play that Connor anatomizes as ‘the disciplined fostering of *agon*’ and ‘the disorderly principle of *ilinx*’ (2011: 115) have a particular resonance within performance making, where discipline and disorder structure the temporality of devising processes and participatory projects. Indeed, one could imagine the vertigo-inducing *ilinx* being a desirable experience for 1960s participants at the Fun Palace (cf. Price’s radical design), or ‘the deadly earnestness of *agon*’ (183) being an inevitable feature of Brook’s RSC Experimental Group (cf. Jackson’s oral history). Indeed, the tension between *ilinx* and *agon* might prove a useful dichotomy when considering PaR, in which sometimes highly energetic practices can trouble research questions, while most disciplinary research does not currently make habitual use of

movement. Furthermore, the complex relationship between *paidia* and *ludus*, regarding the *disciplining of play*, evokes the physical restrictions of Beckett's *Play* and Fail Better's *Discords*. In these examples, *paidia* (the freedom to play) was harnessed in the rehearsal process, in order to focus the performers' energy as *ludus* (the development of rules). Connor, who has also written extensively on Beckett (e.g. 1988; 2010), captures a highly significant problem for embodiment in sport where: 'the body is always up against, and going beyond, itself' (2010: 18). This has a notable parallel in performance, where the body is also 'up against, and going beyond, itself'. In my PaR work, especially *Endlessness*, the overflowing of the body into the environment, was a central feature of the experiment. In *Fail Better Fragments* we devised a permeable environment for both performers and participants. I will argue below that PaR, and my historical examples, create new forms of embodiment through performance practice and play behaviour.

iii. Forms of embodiment

Reconsidering the phenomenological body as 'an ensemble of lived meanings' (Carman, 2008: 109), allows me to explore my research findings for, and through, specific bodies. In these practices, the forms of embodiment have evolved significantly over the course of the research. In *Discords*, for example, the restrictions of a fixed wooden set conditioned the movements of the actor's heads. In *Endlessness*, the tight spotlight of a lamp in total blackout limited physical space for the performer; and in *Fail Better Fragments*, where shared 'effort' (e.g. Press or Thrust) conditioned bodily movement within space. In each of these examples, different modes of embodiment were generating alternative meanings in performance. While these modes of embodiment could all be considered 'playful', the nuances of each movement and its quality produced different epistemological outcomes. From the historical case studies, I have come to understand a primary element of the thesis as *corporeality*, specifically the materiality of embodiment

and how this impacts upon performance process and its temporality (cf. Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 75). To some extent, this has allowed me to de-mythologize celebrated 1960s processes by understanding the materiality of performance practice via rehearsals, laboratories and archives.

In Chapters 1–3 I discussed the ‘genetics of performance’ (cf. Feral, 2008: 223–233) ‘corporeal laboratories’ (cf. McMullan, 2010: 57), and ‘living architecture’ (cf. Preston-Dunlop in McCaw, 2011: 176). Each of these approaches to performance has adopted a broadly phenomenological approach, in which, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s terms: ‘my body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task. And indeed its spatiality is not... a *spatiality of position*, but a *spatiality of situation*’ (1962: 103–4). The body as a situated attitude has currency in contemporary scholarship on human embodiment (e.g. McMullan, 2010), and the *situated-ness* of bodies has become a central focus of PaR (e.g. Heron and Johnson, 2014). The body is no longer ‘an object in the world, but [...] our means of communication with it’ (92). Therefore, my work on the body in rehearsals, laboratories, archives and playgrounds could be considered a phenomenology of practice. In each of these environments the body has been defined through its interaction with material objects and ‘epistemic things’ (cf. Borgdorff: 193).

In addition to the *situated-ness* of the perceiving body, experimental practice must always already be re-inventing its own histories (e.g. Warhol and the Living Theater in Harding, 2013). In staging an experiment with performing bodies, the researcher is recalling a previous material event known to its participants, but repeating it *with a difference*. This, in turn, draws upon Marvin Carlson’s understanding of ‘theatre as a repository and living museum of cultural memory’ (2003: 165). Indeed, I explicitly worked with the notion of theatre practice as living archive in *Fail Better Fragments*. The malleability of the body itself enabled these experimental performances to create research

outcomes, because the body was both receiver and transmitter of perception. For Carman: ‘As bodily perceivers, we are necessarily part of the perceptible world we perceive; we are not just *in* the world, but *of* it’ (2008: 133). This being *of* the world is crucial when considering the implication of PaR methods, for as much as my collaborators’ bodies are implicated in the research, *my body* is the fundamental locus of the research process. My body has not only been *in* archives, libraries, rehearsals, performances, workshops, conferences, installations and laboratories, but has *affected* those processes as I observed their material conditions unfolding. My being *of* the world, as I researched it, has a central significance for the thesis as a whole.

I will reconsider my own subjectivity by comparing the outcomes of PaR with their historical counterparts, thus: a) Devine’s Beckett/my Beckett, b) Brook’s Artaud/my Artaud, and c) Littlewood’s Laban/my Laban. Fundamentally, I am researching other practitioners through my own practice. My self-reflexivity as researching-practitioner can be seen as an artistic benefit (I have inherited a craft from other practitioners), but also an experimental challenge (I have not inherited this craft directly). The supposed objectivity of the researcher would imply that my distance from each process (through observation, controls, standardization) is more desirable and scholarly, compared with my total immersion in each process.

However, the dual-viewpoint that has been afforded me (*through/about* practice) has enabled a new perspective to emerge. This perspective locates its objectivity in the re-iteration and the reflexivity of the experiments themselves. For example, the laboratory conditions enabled a controlled repetition of practices under the same material circumstances. The performances also enabled a re-iteration of experimental outcomes, but in the domain of public engagements and community participation. During this process of research, my own location as the only observer of these transitions, across five years of practice in different venues, has enabled me to make some research conclusions.

However, those conclusions were only possible through a sustained and solitary period of reflection, processing the documentation of events, and generating multiple drafts about the practices themselves. This became a second level of re-iteration, the creative dislocation of practices from their original context, alongside theatre histories and discursive paradigms. Ultimately, what emerged was an entirely new territory, navigated by my own subjective hunches, as much as my objective doubts.

II. Historiographical PaR: three examples

My claim for a hybrid methodology that positions PaR as ‘unfinished thinking’ embraces the *messiness* of trying to create knowledge through performance. Firstly, Jenny Hughes, with Kidd and McNamara, addresses ‘the usefulness of mess’ in ‘Artistry, Improvisation and Decomposition in the Practice of Research in Applied Theatre’ (2011). Secondly, Campbell and Farrier have more recently discussed ‘Queer PaR’ as ‘a fabulously messy business’ (2015: 83), in which they conclude: ‘Messiness here does not equate to methodlessness: by embracing failure, overflow and unruly erotics, these projects produce knowledge in ways that add to the field while raising questions about the functioning and ideological biases of the academy’ (87). By embracing the ‘mess’ of different approaches to epistemology, I am developing a form of transdisciplinary performance research that makes use of a variety of established tools (e.g. historiographical inquiry alongside creative practice). In each of the examples below, I will present new projects as concluding outcomes, in order to start mapping PaR futures and alternative trajectories for transdisciplinary performance. I will be developing the following model of transdisciplinarity in relation to PaR:

Transdisciplinarity claims that disciplines cannot individually address the complex problems that emerge in society today, and consequently researchers need to work in teams and across

disciplines... These problems cannot be divided into areas that are 'scientific', 'cultural', 'political', or 'societal' since they are, from an ecological point of view, interrelated.

(Daniel in Allegue et al., 2009: 153)

i. Devine's Beckett/My Beckett

Chapter 1 outlined how Devine's production of *Play* caused controversy in rehearsal. This controversy has been understood as symptomatic of Beckett's mechanization of acting through a dehumanizing process of conditioning performers. I identified that Beckettian practice then and now employed *ludic* rules for game playing without fully asserting 'the deadly earnestness of *agon*' (Connor, 2011: 183). The strictures of the Beckett Estate in practice control the application of his rules and codes, rather than humiliating producers in combat. The anecdotal accounts relating to the latter are often embellished by theatrical communities and over exaggerated by the cultural media (e.g. 'Deborah Warner: "I'm no cowboy when it comes to text"' in Gussow 1996: 100).

As I have shown, Devine insisted on needing 'guts' for 'experimental works' (in Wardle, 1978: 208) and this sometimes sits unhappily with the Beckett Estate. While my own experience has been that the Estate can warmly support experimentation on Beckett, some have different experiences (e.g. 'I am sometimes wary of how rigid the Estate has been in controlling the work', An Interview with Ian Rickson, 2014: 98). There remains a problem with experimentation in relation to Beckett and performance, and this thesis has informed at least two PaR projects that address this through practice. The first is the Samuel Beckett Laboratory at Trinity College Dublin, which I do not need to fully articulate here, as it has been the subject of a special issue of the *Journal of Beckett Studies* (Heron and Johnson, 2014).

However, I would like to pay special attention to a second project here, the AHRC-funded *Beckett and Brain Science* (see Barry, Broome and Heron, 2014).²⁸ In this project ‘Devine’s Beckett’ gave way to what I am playfully calling ‘my Beckett’, informed by *Discords* and the research into Devine’s production of *Play*. I will focus here on an interdisciplinary event in September 2012 at Warwick (which I co-organized with Elizabeth Barry), specifically my practical workshop, described here by one of the participants, Angela Woods:

Through a series of brief and deceptively simple activities involving both the articulation of our own ‘inner monologues’ and readings from the play, Heron created a space of spontaneous revelation – about the relationship between thought and speech, prosody and affect, embodiment and linguistic sense-making, non-sense and modes of listening. By inhabiting Beckett’s text, even for a few minutes, we discovered aspects of its rhythm and its (refusal of) sense that might otherwise have eluded us, and were able, seamlessly, so it seemed, to reflect on how these discoveries could in turn illuminate the dynamics of the clinical encounter. Far from opposing, or even complementing, the intense scholarly work being pursued in *Beckett and Brain Science*, this interlude of embodied learning ‘spoke,’ so it seemed, directly to the questions at the heart of the project. (*Centre for the Medical Humanities* website, 2012)

So ‘my Beckett’ is emerging as an applied Beckett, which is paradoxical in a performance tradition that rejects its own mastery, in ways described by Bersani and Dutoit as an ‘art of impoverishment’ (1993). This recalls McMullan’s account of: ‘Beckett’s paradoxical relationship to notions of authority and failure’ (1994: 206), which has informed this particular strand of inquiry. I suggest that this paradox can be elided with my own *discipline/play* problem (concerning the complexities of the *mechanical/scientific/experimental*

²⁸ The full terms of the collaborative AHRC ‘Science in Culture’ project can be found online at *Beckett and Brain Science* (University of Warwick website, 2012)

and the *organic/theatrical/playful*). I will explore this tension in relation to the *Beckett and Brain Science* event in 2012.

The day began with a devised performance, based on Beckett's *Not I*, shown at an open developmental stage to a group of participants from the following constituencies: medicine, neurology, psychiatry, health education, philosophy, literary studies and drama. This enabled the work to respond to the presence of scientists and scholars in a proactive, as opposed to reactive, manner. The significance of this is that Beckett's 'de-humanization' was actually used to promote academic debate within the medical humanities. The organic bodies of the performers confronted an interdisciplinary audience, and digital technology was used to heighten the mechanization of performers. Furthermore, the participants were then offered two modes of response: practice or discussion (pleasingly, there was an equal spread between the workshop and the seminar). Doctors-in-training were encouraged to take part in the practice-based workshop as we were keen to explore the impact of these methods upon clinical practice.²⁹ When working on Beckett with clinicians, the paradox of *discipline/play* re-emerged as a tension between medical diagnosis and compassionate care. The relationship with Mouth and Auditor in *Not I* (not unlike the heads and interrogative light in *Play*) became a pedagogic tool for participation. The participants explained that they find it difficult to balance their empathetic spontaneity as a human being with the strict scientific rigours of clinical practice; 'imagine!.. not suffering!..' (Beckett, 1986: 377).

In the five years that divide my first formal PaR on Beckett from its unexpected outcomes in medicine, I would conclude that performance is always somewhat applied, stretching beyond itself like the phenomenological body in Merleau-Ponty's theories of embodiment. When Judith Butler reads these theories, she sees that, 'the flesh is not

²⁹ This led to the NHS Health Education (Kent, Surrey and Sussex) pilot project *Beckett on the Wards*, which took place between April and July 2013 (in four hospital trusts for multi-professional teams of consultant psychiatrists, nursing staff, simulated patients and health administrators).

something one has, but, rather the web in which one lives' (2005: 181) and concerns herself with *tactility* in relation to human embodiment. She continues: 'It is not simply what I touch of the other, or of myself, but the condition of possibility of touch, a tactility that exceeds any given touch, and that cannot be reducible to a unilateral action performed by a subject' (2005: 181). I include her analysis here, as I would like to suggest the PaR enables a greater *tactility* across bodies of knowledge; in short, the research touches the practices of others. However, my rather optimistic conclusion comes with a warning from Butler: 'This does not mean that we are all touched well, or that we know how to touch in return, but only that our very capacity to feel and our emergence as knowing and acting beings is at stake in the exchange' (204).

I have argued that Devine's *Play*, Fail Better's *Discords* and new practices (e.g. the Beckett Laboratory at TCD or the *Beckett and Brain Science* workshop performances) have developed 'a greater *tactility*' when it comes to the enduring problems of Beckett in performance, and the *organic/mechanical* problem specifically.

ii. Brook's Artaud/My Artaud

Chapter 2 concerned Brook's misappropriation of Artaud's writing in order to legitimize his 'scientific research' with the RSC Experimental Group in 1964. As I have shown, this case study demonstrates a tension between the *theatrical* and the *scientific* in experimental practice. While my PaR project *Endlessness* re-iterated the same problems, there have been two subsequent projects that respond to this problem more successfully. Firstly, I would argue that my practice within the AHRC *Beckett and Brain Science* project discussed above was directly informed by the *Endlessness* experiments. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, the collaborative quality of the PaR is directly improved by the presence of scientists and artists in the same spatial-temporal process. We finally had the material circumstances to do this in the AHRC event and the projects that have followed. It

meant that my practice shifted from (closed) experimental performance to (open) transdisciplinary performance, and I will deal with this difference below.

However, I would like to briefly discuss a second PaR project that has emerged from this period of research. From 2012–13, in the research and development process for *Study (after Darwin)*, Fail Better worked on the biography of Charles Darwin in order to find a theatrical vocabulary for biological inheritance and the study of phylogenetics. Unlike *Endlessness*, where we experimented with staging the scientific method, *Study* moved towards a new understanding of scientific discovery in relation to mental health. During this process, we directly involved a science educator (RSC Teaching Fellow at Warwick), a computational biologist (MRC Functional Genomics Unit at Oxford) and the same Warwick philosopher and Oxford psychiatrist that had collaborated with the company members on *Endlessness*³⁰. While *Study* was an outcome of *Endlessness*, the physical conditions had changed considerably (including the venue from Oxford to Warwick), and there was a return to theatrical conventions, such as plot and character. This involved beginning to develop a script (for theatre), rather than devise a score (for performance). I retrospectively understand this shift as a temporary return to interdisciplinary practice, before the more radical experiments with transdisciplinarity. Brook's practice misused Artaud to move away from strict disciplinary work on Shakespeare towards collaborative interdisciplinary work with the RSC Experimental Group. Ultimately, he would abandon the RSC (c.1970) and search instead for an intercultural method at his CIRT in Paris.³¹

The *theatrical/scientific* problem can therefore become a creative opportunity for radically changing the direction of one's practice: 'the act I'm talking about aims at the true organic and physical transformation of the human body' (Artaud in Schumacher,

³⁰ Respectively: Nicholas Barker, Christopher Ponting, Eileen John and Matthew Broome.

³¹ I would suggest that in late period (since he remodeled the CIRT as the *CICT*, with an emphasis on *creation* rather than research) has been characterized as both transdisciplinary and transcultural.

1989: 216). Indeed, Artaud's conception of the body implied an excessively transdisciplinary revolution, where: 'any idea of theatre and performance is ruled out, as well as any idea of science, religion, and art' (1989: 216). The 1960s practitioners were no doubt drawn to this transgressive call to abandon conventional forms, but Brook and Marowitz soon ran into the limitations of this approach. As Marowitz satirically noted: 'an in-group definition of "Theatre of Cruelty" was twelve actors working for twelve pounds a week' (in Williams, 1988: 34). Of course, Brook also warns that: 'Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed' (1990: 60), and my Artaud *is* an applied Artaud, and therefore, somewhat regrettably, betrayed. The betrayal of the Artaudian legacy is unavoidable when trying to apply his writings to performance practice. The core problem with Artaud's *cruelty* is that it loosens its radical potency if we redefine it as 'self-discipline' (as his own textual revisions implored us to do). In contemporary PaR, it has been challenging to be at once 'Artaudian' and simultaneously participatory. In responding to this problem, my practice has attempted to recapture a specific materiality (of Artaudian embodiment) through theatre laboratories. I have argued that Artaud's writings particularly endorse laboratory qualities (self-reflexive, meta-theatrical and re-iterative) due to his hypersensitivity to physiology. Alongside the many other practitioners that have used Artaud to serve a purpose, I echo Sheer echoing Derrida quoting Artaud:

The theatre is a passionate overflowing / A frightful transfer of forces / From a body / To body.

This transfer cannot be reproduced twice.

(Artaud in Sheer, 2004: 45)

This exhaustible resource of embodied transfer must surely take place at a specific venue. My thesis has spent a considerable portion of its time in the laboratory, as a venue where bodies seem to exhaust themselves in passionate overflow. Unfortunately, the theatre laboratory becomes one of the last remaining spaces where Artaud's writings can be

rigorously investigated. Just as Brook's 'scientific research' and Chaikin's 'private laboratory' re-imagined theatre practice as a site of experimentation, their subsequent shifts towards political engagement (as opposed to aesthetic monasticism) signaled a gradual disillusionment with Artaud's vision. This shift from the 'private' space of ensemble experimentation to the 'public' space of participatory performance was also a shift within my own practice during this research process. Just as Chaikin's Open Theatre experienced this shift as a 'breakup of the group', he was also attuned to the new possibilities this presented: 'We have come to learn that the world cannot be shut out; we must examine the world within ourselves so that we can understand the way in which it is dictating our choices' (1972: 156).

iii. Littlewood's Laban/My Laban

The fourth chapter demonstrated the ways in which Laban's thinking informed Littlewood's *Fun Palace* and later 'ludic' projects (e.g. *Learn-to-Play*), creating a general praxis of movement in terms of social engagement. While *Fail Better Fragments (FBF)* made use of this movement praxis, for both audience and ensemble, the primary outcome has been a transdisciplinary method to facilitate corporeal movement for both performers and participants. *FBF* made use of Clive Barker's description of Littlewood's practice as: 'a laboratory through which [she] was able to explore such qualities as time, weight, direction and flow – the qualities through which Laban characterised all movements' (in Hodge, 2000: 119). I have extended this description of her ludic practice into a practical investigation (*FBF*) of her *legitimate failure* (*Fun Palace*), which evolved her vision: 'from an alterative theatre venue, to a cybernetic learning machine' (Lobsinger, 2000: 132). In this short sub-section, I will give one brief example of how this research has influence my own collaborative practice, through the establishment of *Emerge* in 2014

(a developmental network for Student Ensemble alumni). Before I do so, I will reconsider the impact of Laban upon Littlewood's practice.

For Irving Wardle, writing in the *Independent on Sunday* (03.04.94): 'Her dream of brightening up the life of East Ham with a Fun Palace was an embarrassment even to her supporters.' In this article, Wardle was reviewing the idiosyncratic *Joan's Book* – which I have drawn upon from extensively in Chapter 3 – and he claims: 'Littlewood by that point [1963] had come to detest audiences. Everybody should participate, and that evidently applies to readers as well. But the book does what she wants' (03.04.94). Wardle also states that: 'the Littlewood actor mutated from a *Laban athlete*, into a classical realist, a clown technician, a spontaneous character improviser, a street trader; anyone who could get up and hold a crowd, and finally the crowd itself' (03.04.94, emphasis added). The notion of the *Laban athlete* is significant for my argument that corporeal movement can be radically transdisciplinary. While the physical 'limits of performance' (cf. Blau, 2000: 307-320) have been extensively dealt with elsewhere (see also McKenzie, 2001), I would like to address the extreme athleticism of Littlewood's vision where performer and participant could play, compete and flow. In this sense, as we have seen from recent projects such as *Fun Palaces* (2014), her work is 'a treasure-map' (Wardle, 1994) for future generations. My own PaR has tested this principle in practice, with a focus on the transdisciplinary applications of theatrical performance.

The *Emerge Festival and Laboratory* (Warwick Arts Centre and IATL, 2014) has enabled a network of Student Ensemble alumni and Warwick graduate theatre companies to return to the university for experimental projects with current students and community members. I initiated this project in order to make my work with the Student Ensemble sustainable *and* participatory. In convening this practice, I imagine the university campus *as* Fun Palace and encourage these emerging practitioners to collaborate with staff and students from diverse fields of research. This work already

involves six theatre companies ‘younger’ than Fail Better, namely: Dumbshow, Curious Directive, FellSwoop, Kill the Beast, Fat Git and Barrell Organ. This responds to Jen Harvie’s observation that artists are already subverting neoliberal models of production: ‘First, practically, they are forming networks of affiliation and mutual support that challenge both individualism and hierarchies of power’ (2013: 107). This potential has emerged directly from our period as resident artists within the university (*a dwelling*).

To *dwell* (cf. Ingold, 2000: 186) within the modern university campus is to be shaped by disciplinary mechanisms, stimulated by interdisciplinary collaborations and seduced by transdisciplinary performance. The task for ‘scholar-clowns’ (cf. Barker, 1977), such as myself, is to move towards a ‘university of the streets’ (after Littlewood), by providing community-experiences within the campus, and campus-experiences within the community. This will be greatly enhanced by a greater awareness of playfulness and flow, and an equality of opportunities to become a *Laban athlete* (cf. Wardle, 1994).

III. From Playfulness to Flow

In this section I will first consider how the state of playfulness can catalyze the transdisciplinary potential of flow. Writing about *Play, Playfulness, Creativity and Innovation* (Patrick Bateson and Paul Martin, 2013), musician and author Pat Kane wrote: ‘play will be to the 21st century what work was to the industrial age - our dominant way of knowing, doing and creating value’ (viii). This extraordinary claim has a parallel in performance studies, where Jon McKenzie declares that: ‘performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge’ (2001: 18). Bateson and Martin are keen to differentiate between the myriad forms and functions of ‘play’ and the specific condition of ‘playful play’ that I will focus on here. In the PaR experiments described above, the transformative moments of flow (cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) took

place during when performance was at its most excessive and playful. This recalls Zarrilli's description of flow as 'a complex set of subsystems or structures of consciousness', which involves 'unlearning' (2001: 40). Flow in a state of 'playful play' (cf. Bateson and Martin, 2013) can produce radical and transdisciplinary performances.

There is a multiplication of knowledge(s) in playful states and flow experiences. Within 'play studies' (e.g. Huizinga, 1949; Bruner et al., 1976; Sutton-Smith, 1997), one object of study was the restless energy within most cultures, which Csikszentmihalyi (hereafter Csik.) in terms of flow:

In a flow state, action follows upon action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention by the actor. He experiences it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which he is in control of his actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present, and future. (1975: 36)

I will focus here on Csik's specific understanding of the relationship between play, creativity and flow. Csik's 'flow experiences' (1975: 36) are intrinsic forces within creative acts that can be studied, defined and even *located*. For example, rather than asking 'what is creativity?' Csik asks 'where is creativity?' thus locating it within a network of practice and pointing out that: 'it does not happen in people's heads' (1997: 24).

To some extent *creativity* has been positioned within this thesis as a research method, whereas my study of *creating* has led me to conclude that transdisciplinary performance has the capacity to disorientate knowledge(s) through complex movement. For Howard Gardner: 'the key idea in the psychologist's conception of creativity has been *divergent thinking*' (1993: 20) which supports the notion of creative acts as subversive. There has also been a particular interest in creativity from the computer sciences – from the 1960s cybernetists to Margaret Boden – who studied the nodes and networks of complex systems. For Boden: 'human minds are far too complex' for a full scientific

understanding of creativity, ‘but not... too mysterious’ (2004: 322). From these thinkers, I have reconsidered *divergence* and *complexity* as specific modes of thought for creative practice. It is through the divergent and complex in performance practice that research methods can become *permeable* to new epistemologies. In short: creativity can be better thought of as ‘flow experience’ that produces knowledge(s).

In *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness* (1988) Csik is ‘intrigued by the question of intrinsic motivation, I turned to the literature on play in hope of finding an explanation’ (5). He also draws upon Huizinga, Caillois, and Sutton-Smith to conclude that:

Play is clearly intrinsically motivated. Whatever its evolutionary significance and adaptive value might be, people play because it is enjoyable... My contribution to this literature in the late sixties was an article describing the historical changes in the way rock climbing has been practiced and experienced [Csik, 1969], and an embryonic model of the flow experience. (5)

His research in the 1960s–70s revealed that: ‘despite the obvious difference between such endeavours as climbing rocks and writing music, a common set of structural characteristics was found to distinguish those patterns of action that produced flow from the rest of everyday life’ (8). He suggests this sense of flow concerns ‘optimal experience’ so we must distinguish it from Laban’s FLOW which describes an ‘effort attitude’ for human movement. However, I will compare these understandings of flow in order to challenge goal-orientated definitions of creativity. I will first argue that the objectification or commercialization of creativity is one of the greatest threats to creative processes themselves then I will attempt to outline an alternative understanding of ‘playful play’ within transdisciplinary performance.

The value of both Laban’s FLOW (c.1947) and Csik’s flow (1975) lies in their practical application. Unlike the totalizing vision of creativity as a mechanism assumed by

Boden et al., experiences of flow emerge through organic processes. For Csik: ‘The flow concept was developed as a result of sheer curiosity. It was the fruit of ‘pure’ research, motivated only by the desire to solve an intriguing puzzle in the mechanism of human behavior... it was very ethereal, bordering on the mystical’ (1988: 11). As for Laban, a mystical practice had lead to a series of applications for diverse human activities. This was especially true in the ways in which Laban’s ‘efforts’ (of which FLOW is part) were adapted for factory workers (with F.C. Lawrence) and school children (with Lisa Ullmann). It seems a similar evolution took place with Csik’s flow, where: ‘educational and occupational uses of the model seem to be the most urgent ones’ (12). This emphasis on accessible flow experiences – as play-literacy for all – recalls Littlewood and Price’s *Fun Palace* objectives as well as Newlove and Dalby’s *Laban for All* (2004).

My PaR projects aimed to make practical applications of flow for both performers and participants. However, my use of ‘flow experience’ is more organic than mechanical. For example, my comparison between *Play* (1964) and *Discords* (2010) identified a Beckettian form of ‘flow’ that forced the actor’s body in to a different relationship with itself. The Beckettian body, as argued in Chapter 1, acts as ‘organic machinery’ so that words could flow through the subject as if it were a vessel. In Whitelaw’s *Not I*, for example, Mouth is both receiving (from the brain) and transmitting (through the voice) an experience of flow. In Fail Better’s *Discords*, the vents (from which the disembodied heads emerge) created gaps through which movement could flow. Therefore, I have adapted both senses of flow/FLOW, to produce a new synthetic understanding of ‘flow’. I did so progressively in Chapters 1–3: through *plasticity* in Chapter 1, *reflexivity* in Chapter 2 and *permeability* in Chapter 3. Across these processes, I attempted to create a practical space for ‘flow’ in order to meet my specific experimental objectives. In each project, performance environments were constructed to include vents, voids or vacua so as to facilitate participation through rehearsal, laboratory and

archives. My approach also attempted to respond to experimental histories from 1960s British theatre practice, where Devine, Brook and Littlewood created environments for 'flow'. In each example, the NT *Play* rehearsals, the RSC *ToC* experiments and the proposed *Fun Palace* created spaces for radical play that implicitly combined elements from both Csik's flow (a psychological state) and Laban's FLOW (a corporeal effort). My PaR has fused these elements across three separate performance projects.

However, Csik's flow has since been co-opted by the 'creativity studies' community, a shift he has encouraged through publications such as *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Intervention* (1997). Rather than simply positioning flow in relation to play theory, the 'creativity turn' in higher education has coincided with a neo-liberal and late capitalist approach to 'knowledge production'. Within this division of labour, the artist-scholar is identified as resource to be managed, rather than a co-creator of knowledge(s). My concern here is that the invention of creativity (as an objectification of creative process) is a suspect and capitalist enterprise, one that de-radicalizes play and disciplines creative practitioners. I will return to this problem below via a closer analysis of Csik's thinking and the introduction of ideas from Jen Harvie's *Fair Play* (2013).

The claim that: 'creativity is a central source of meaning in our lives for several reasons' (Csik, 1997: 1) has encouraged some scholars to treat 'creativity' as an object of study in its own right (e.g. International Center for the Studies of Creativity at Buffalo State University). Csik gives two main reasons for this statement: firstly, that the more interesting aspects of culture issue from individual acts of creativity and, secondly, that: 'we are living more fully' (2) when experiencing creativity as a process. Clearly his first comment discounts ecological approaches to non-human creativity (and indeed human-animal interactions), his second comment draws directly from his work on 'optimal experience' and flow. It is the latter I will be concerned with here. For Csik: 'Creativity is the cultural equivalent of the process of genetic changes that result in biological

evolution, where random variations take place in the chemistry of our chromosomes' (7). Returning to my *theatrical/scientific* problem I note a tension here between a subjective notion of flow (a personal experience) and an objectification of those experiences as creativity (an evolutionary step).

Using the now popular concept of the *meme* (cf. Dawkins, 1976), Csik argues that each unit of cultural evolution has to be re-learned by each generation, and that: 'if enough of the right people see the change as an improvement, it will become part of the culture' (7). The problem with this approach is that Csik repeatedly positions creativity in terms of its recognition by others in the same field, or its adoption within another field. While his initial definition of creativity as an intrapersonal process – of preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation and elaboration – later emerges to have a psychoanalytical resonance: 'the creative person is one who succeeds in displacing the quest for forbidden knowledge into a permissible curiosity' (100). However, a core characteristic of creative process emerges as personal enjoyment, in which flow experiencers: 'described the feeling when things were going well as an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness' (110). Furthermore, he claims that 'there is no worry of failure' in flow (112), and this perspective has been important for my thesis.

In Chapters 1–3 I noted that performers and participants often described their experience in terms of playfulness, transcendence or liberation. I have been particularly interested in the paradoxes of these states, especially when these freedoms seem to have emerged from intense structure. However, in Beckett, Artaud and Laban's practices, there were specific conditions of human embodiment where the risk of failure (or actual breakdown) signaled an important phase in the creative process. For Csik: 'the reason that failure is not an issue is that in flow it is clear what has to be done, and our skills are potentially adequate to the challenges' (112). This disappearance of self-consciousness is an important feature of flow and so: 'the activity becomes autotelic' (113).

I would suggest that Csik's work on the *autotelic* [activity for its own sake] is far more resonant in relation to flow than it is to creativity. If we are to believe that creativity is a thing that can be measured, studied, prodded and exploited then it is not really *autotelic*, rather it would be *exotelic* (goal-orientated activity). Unfortunately, 'creativity studies' has already co-opted flow for the growth of the so-called Creative and Cultural Industries, which make the creative processes (which should be *autotelic*) pro-social and *exotelic*. From my own experience of researching this thesis, I have witnessed attempts to de-radicalise play by turning it towards public service (e.g. *Cultural Olympiad*, 2012) and to discipline creative practitioners within 'neoliberal' models of production as 'artpreneurs' (Harvie, 2013: 62).

Harvie 'focuses on the potentially detrimental effects of hegemonic expectations imposed on artists to model entrepreneurialism in ways that both indulge and inherently celebrate neoliberal capitalism' (62–3). I concur with Harvie's assessment that this harms artists and artistic cultures in three ways: 'One, it insists that art prioritizes self-interest and individualism. Two, it requires art to acquiesce to creative destruction as an apparently inevitable by-product of innovation... And three, it obliges art relentlessly to pursue productivity, permanent growth and profit' (63). I would also argue that – unlike Laban's FLOW and Csik's flow – such 'artpreneurialism' exposes artists to a different kind of 'flow' (economic and fiscal flow). It goes without saying that this submission to market forces clashes with the work of Devine, Brook and Littlewood in the service of Beckett, Artaud and Laban retrospectively. However, as performance practice is also densely material, most of the projects discussed in this thesis were entwined with socio-economic forces beyond their control. One important criticism of PaR has been that it forces artists to work within the business priorities of the UK research councils (cf. Allegue et al., 2009; Nelson, 2013). Instead, I have demonstrated how artists might subvert the dominant orthodoxies of neoliberal capitalism, by focusing on process and

flow. My focus throughout on practice recalls what Richard Sennett has so eloquently referred to as ‘craftsmanship’ (2009). In this model, failure is about learning to make, learning to play, and learning to flow.

IV. PaR as ‘not-yet-knowing’

‘Flow’ is crucial to the experience of conducting research through practice. For Laban: ‘People who indulge in flow find pleasure in the unrestricted freedom of fluency, without necessarily giving too much attention to the various shades of the time, the weight and the space development of the movement’ (McCaw, 2011: 227). PaR artist-scholars have the radical potential to become such people. They conduct research through: ‘movement with free flow [which] cannot be easily interrupted or suddenly stopped; it takes time until the moving person gains the necessary control over the flow in order to stop’ (227). In a sense, I had to temporarily stop moving in order to produce this thesis. However, I used the memory and documentation of flow experiences to inform my own non-movement as a researcher, and once I mastered this new form of interaction, I re-searched for the archival and historical flow experiences of others. This thesis emerged between 2012–15 when my own practical movement stopped, and when the practices of 2009–12 could become more fully *thought*. In this final section, therefore, I will draw on Borgdorff’s notion of artistic practice as ‘unfinished thinking’ (2012: 194) alongside the notion of ‘not-yet-knowing’ (2012: 194) which he draws from Rheinberger, in order to conclude with a revised understanding of laboratory theatre as ‘transdisciplinary performance’.

Within an international context, as I hope to have shown, PaR is a diverse and hybrid methodology. The IFTR working group alone has an international reach across every inhabited continent on the globe. Maybe, as Clov says to the anguished Hamm in Beckett’s *Endgame*: ‘Something is taking its course’ (1986: 98). So, what precisely is taking

its course, and how will this inform future research through performance?

Fundamentally, I have been dealing with venues and processes for experimentation (i.e. various forms of ‘laboratory’) and the play-spaces that may emerge *at* those venues and *through* their processes. In my Introduction I argued that the trans-discipline of PaR is no longer ‘at the crossroads’ (Conquergood, 2002), but now could be described as engaged in an ecological ‘entanglement’ (cf. Chiew, 2011). This, I argued, was as a result of the unique conditions of embodiment practiced by PaR methods in transdisciplinary performance studies. As a result of my analysis – through practice – of histories and procedures of experimentation, I aimed to identify three dichotomies in performance practice. While the *organic*, *theatrical* and *playful* has frequently been set in opposition to the *mechanical*, *scientific* and *experimental*, I intend finally to draw these oppositions together into a combined statement on how ‘transdisciplinary performance’ might be constituted in relation to my own practice.

The physical cultures under investigation in this thesis have been researched through *praxis*. In using this word I am at once dispensing with theory *and* returning to Schon’s ‘knowledge-in-practice’ (1983: 69). Nelson makes particularly good use of this term in his 2013 *PaR in the Arts*, where he states:

Intelligent practice is at the core of my model and a practice is characteristically submitted as substantial evidence of the research inquiry... Reflection on the kinds of knowledge practitioners bring to their workspaces is a useful starting-point to establish what knowledges are in play, and much remains to be understood, through research, of how arts practices function. (40)

In relation to my thesis, I would respond to Nelson’s model in the following ways: a) the PaR projects detailed in Chapters 1–3 have demonstrated the intelligence of practice within their own contexts, b) digital documentation of these projects has been submitted alongside this in order to support the written elements, c) the knowledge(s) brought into

each process has been clearly identified through the writing and evidenced by the documentation, and d) the historical case studies have provided a context to understand the arts practice. However, I believe something more interesting has happened alongside these rather pedestrian objectives and outcomes, as it would also seem that real bodies have been changed through practice. My practice also has been transformed from devising theatre to experimental performance. Nelson goes on to identify:

The rigour involved in different aspects of the dynamic process [which] differs from that of the traditional (positivist) scientific method but is consonant with more modern conceptions of scientific knowing (such as complexity and emergence), as they have developed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. (46–7)

If scientific methods are moving towards new epistemological metaphors, such as complexity and emergence, then the *transdisciplinary* potential of performance has a genuine opportunity to contribute to epistemology. As Kershaw has stated: ‘the project [TRANSNET, Henry Daniel, 2009: 148–162] patently modeled a transdisciplinarity through which the conventional binaries of bodies-technologies, cultures-disciplines and arts-sciences may be confounded’ (in Allegue et al., 2009: 16).

As I have shown above, one such shared metaphor is *entanglement*, and so my praxis attempted to loosen some of the knots of 1960s experimental theatre. However, just as the 1960s marked the beginning of an interdisciplinary turn within the academy, so PaR can be understood as a contemporary transdisciplinary turn within the knowledge economies of neo-liberal capitalism. By privileging practice and legitimating failure, performance research can become genuinely participatory and accessible to a wider public, perhaps more than ever before. This comes with some problems, alongside the copious rewards, so that notions of rigour and discipline are often contested in these new venues and play-spaces. Nelson’s ‘anticipation, preparation and “sixth-sense” awareness’

(47) is not enough here. A more radical approach to practice is required, perhaps in line with Borgdorff's conception of 'artworks as epistemic things' (2012: 193). Drawing upon the work of Rheinberger, he argues that:

An experimental system thus involves the realization and articulation of epistemic things that derive their propelling force in the research from their very indeterminacy... Similarly, within artistic practices, artworks are the hybrid objects, situations, or events – the epistemic things – that constitute the driving force in artistic research. (193)

I began to view my performance projects ('the epistemic things') as indeterminate, and potentially transdisciplinary, knowledge when I processed their documentation alongside archival materials from 1960s experimental theatre (as Chapters 1–3 have shown). By submitting my own practice to the enduring problems of theatre history, I was able to re-articulate PaR as 'unfinished thinking' (Borgdorff, 2012: 194) in performance studies. My research went through a sustained period of contemplation (using both digital documentation and historiographical evidence) in order to be more fully *thought*. By placing the PaR documentation in juxtaposition with the archival materials from the 1960s, this 'thought' slowly expressed itself as my 'three problems in performance'. In a final phase of thinking, that took the form of both writing and practicing (*wright*-ing, if you will) I produced this thesis. Borgdorff warns us that: 'artworks as epistemic things can never become fully transparent, and it is this structural lack of completeness that is the fuel and the motor of a creative, constructive practice' (194). Even if that is the case, it is important to recognize that knowledge can emerge through the 'not-yet-knowing' of transdisciplinary performance.

Is this 'not-yet-knowing', a form of knowing?

That is the question.

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